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General Assembly
Fifty-third Session

Official Records

16th plenary meeting
Friday, 25 September 1998, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Opertti ..... (Uruguay)

In the absence of the President, Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 118 (*continued*)

Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (A/53/345/Add.4)

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): In a letter contained in document A/53/345/Add.4, the Secretary-General informs the President of the General Assembly that, since the issuance of his communications contained in documents A/53/345 and addenda 1 to 3, Vanuatu has made the necessary payment to reduce its arrears below the amount specified in Article 19 of the Charter.

May I take it that the General Assembly duly takes note of this information?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Liberia, His Excellency Mr. Monie R. Captan.

Mr. Captan (Liberia): I bring the Assembly greetings from President Charles Taylor and the Government and the people of Liberia.

On behalf of the delegation of Liberia and in my own name, I convey my sincere congratulations to Mr. Opertti on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. His unanimous election to this high office is a credit not only to him but also to his esteemed country. I assure him of my delegation's fullest support and cooperation and wish him every success in the discharge of his duties.

I should like also to register my delegation's appreciation to the President's distinguished predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, the then Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, for the able manner in which he conducted the work of the fifty-second session. The many successes achieved during his tenure of office, especially in the reform of this Organization, attest to his diplomatic skills and his understanding of the problems which confront the Organization and our determined efforts to build a more just and humane international order that is responsive to the legitimate aspirations of all mankind.

We offer special thanks to our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his unrelenting pursuit of the implementation of the mandates entrusted to him by the Assembly. My delegation also commends him for his efforts aimed at the successful execution of the administrative reforms of the Secretariat, and the important focus he has placed on development,

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peacemaking and peace-building efforts, especially in Africa, as the most assured basis for sustainable development.

The Secretary-General's report (A/52/871) on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa provides an in-depth analysis of the social and economic ills of the Continent, which was thoroughly discussed at the ministerial meeting of the Security Council. We fully agree with his assertion that while African Governments must ultimately be held responsible for the problems confronting their countries, meaningful steps must be taken by this Organization to lend support to national measures aimed at alleviating these problems.

In this connection, it is notable that on 6 October 1998, the United Nations will observe the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of its peacekeeping operations. Africa continues to benefit from the United Nations peacekeeping operations aimed at the resolution of conflicts on the continent pursuant to Chapter VIII of the Charter. While welcoming this cooperation, Liberia calls upon the Security Council to employ impartiality and non-selectivity in the execution of its primary role of maintaining international peace and security.

The international political situation continues to be characterized by sustained efforts aimed at the maintenance of international peace and security. While there has been no major eruption of military confrontation between States, intra-State conflicts and civil wars in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea-Bissau, the Sudan and Kosovo, and the territorial dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea have claimed the attention of regional and subregional organizations such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union and the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

These organizations and regional bodies are endeavouring, with the complementary support of the United Nations, to seek negotiated peaceful solutions and to minimize the humanitarian crises, refugee flows and internal displacement caused by conflicts and wars.

With regard to the Middle East, my delegation is deeply concerned about the lack of progress, particularly in connection with the Madrid Conference and the Oslo accords. We are of the view that new initiatives should be undertaken to restart the peace process, focusing on the understanding reached by the parties. Liberia will support renewed efforts by the international community that seek to bring the volatile situation in that region to a fair and equitable conclusion.

The rise in acts of terrorism threatens the independence, sovereignty, freedom, economic and social development of all States. It cannot be overemphasized that terrorism has no justification as a means to solve political differences. Therefore, the Government of Liberia strongly condemns the bombings in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya. It is imperative that concerted actions be taken to combat this unwholesome phenomenon which has no bounds. Liberia is in accord with the proposal of President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt for the convening of an international conference on terrorism to deliberate on the issue.

The world is faced with the frightening prospect of an increase in the number of States with nuclear capability, as well as the proliferation of conventional weapons. We therefore call for more States to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). There is an urgent need to curtail the trafficking in small arms and to promote greater transparency in arms transfers.

The scourge of the worldwide drug problem necessitated the convening of the drug summit in New York in June of this year. It is a source of concern that drug sales have overtaken trade in other commodities, and the money value of this illegal act has reached over $400 billion annually. My Government reaffirms its commitment to tackling the drug problem within its borders and to cooperating at the regional and international levels in keeping with the Political Declaration and the guiding principles outlined at the conclusion of the summit.

The 1990s have been declared an era of globalization. However, the rapid growth of international trade and financial flows has affected most economies in profound ways. Globalization threatens the weak and vulnerable by marginalizing them in the global economic system.

For most developing countries, the debt overhang and unequal participation in the regulation of commodity pricing, declining official development assistance and capital flows are perennial problems that hamper their economic development and integration into the world

economy. My delegation therefore joins in the call for the industrialized countries to bring about equity in the regulatory framework for the financial and exchange markets.

In this connection, Liberia reaffirms its support for the position of the Non-Aligned Movement summit, held recently in Durban, South Africa, that developed countries be urged to accelerate the review of the world financial system, thus ensuring that capital flows were supportive of expansion in trade, employment and development. In addition, there is the need to boost development aid from Western countries and to remove restrictive conditions linked to receiving international assistance.

In particular, my Government welcomes the call by President William Clinton of the United States of America for a meeting in Washington, D.C., in mid-October of this year, of finance ministers and central bank governors from nations of the G-7 and emerging economies to debate steps to shore up the tottering global financial system. His reaffirmation of this proposal, as well as his pledge made to this Assembly on 21 September last, to forge a partnership with Africa, deserves our commendation and support. Also, we cannot agree more with the Secretary-General that the United Nations should be included in the discussion. Its participation will give more international credibility to the decisions that would emerge from the meeting.

Even though recent indicators point to improvement in the economies of several African countries, the vast majority continue to experience negative growth. The largest number of least developed countries are in Africa, and the crippling effects of the heavy external debt and decline in investment and financial flows have been major contributors to the poor economic performance of these countries. There is a need for concerted international action to remedy this state of affairs. The United Nations system-wide support for the development of Africa is a step in the right direction.

My delegation welcomes the recent decision of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, held in July of this year, and the Council's ministerial communiqué on market access for exports from least developed countries, as well as capacity-building and in-service infrastructure development. These decisions deserve full support and should be implemented by Member States.

In this connection, the important initiative taken by the Government of Japan, a prominent member of the G-7, to urgently address Africa's development has the highest commendation of my Government and the appreciation of all African States. My delegation looks forward to actively participating in the important ministerial meeting which will be convened in Tokyo next month on Africa's economic recovery. Moreover, this initiative deserves the wholehearted support of Member States of this Organization, particularly the developed countries.

My delegation notes with satisfaction the efforts by the United Nations to harmonize the issues of development and the environment. With respect to the environment, the decision reached on Agenda 21 during the 1992 Rio Conference is the most comprehensive effort undertaken by the international community to raise awareness of the degradation of the environment and the need to reverse the negative trend. We trust that the issue of the environment will remain a priority on the global agenda.

One important and unquestionable achievement for our Organization to celebrate is the great improvement in the universal character of the Organization. Nevertheless, more efforts must be deployed to ensure that every country becomes a member of this Organization. My delegation believes that in that regard, the exceptional situation of the Republic of China on Taiwan must be examined with a view to the unification of the Chinese people based on their own will and decision. However, we also believe that it is the responsibility of this Organization to provide the impetus for the unification of the two Chinas. History is replete with examples of the membership in this Organization of divided countries, where unification was peacefully settled under the aegis of the United Nations. We have confidence in the ability of the United Nations to allow history to be repeated on a similar matter of grave importance to this Organization. In the interest of equity and the maintenance of regional peace and security, my country calls for the parallel representation in the United Nations of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China on Taiwan.

The matter of reform is one that needs no justification. It is an imperative for the continued relevance of the United Nations. An Organization made up of 185 Member States must, by its nature, allow fair play and democracy to prevail, and not the rule of weighted influence. The tenets of the United Nations Charter do not submit to the principle of "might makes right", but to the enlightened principles of international law which emerge from the objective need for peaceful coexistence. Unless the powerful States recognize this

imperative, the international system will move towards international anarchy rather than towards a more humane, peaceful and stable world order.

These reforms will be meaningless unless parallel reforms can be achieved within the Bretton Woods institutions, the very essence of weighted and undemocratic global influence.

On the question of increase in the membership of the Security Council, Liberia reaffirms its support for an increase for Africa and other under-represented regions on the basis of equitable geographical representation, consistent with the decisions of the Organization of African Unity and the Non-Aligned Movement.

During the fifty-second session of the General Assembly, it was my honour to read the prepared text of Mr. Charles Taylor, President of the Republic of Liberia, to this Assembly. At that time, only two months had passed since his assumption of the leadership of Liberia, following seven years of civil war and the holding of democratic elections in the country.

Since then, the Government has undertaken measures towards the rebuilding of the country, national reconciliation, rehabilitation, repatriation and resettlement.

In light of this, from 19 July to 12 August 1998, the people of Liberia participated in a national conference to deliberate on the future of Liberia under the theme "Vision 2024". This historic undertaking not only reaffirmed President Taylor's commitment to participatory democracy but also afforded a unique opportunity for Liberians at home and abroad to freely deliberate on and propose solutions for the building of a new Liberia.

At the conclusion of the conference, a commission was established and given the responsibility to seek full implementation of the decisions reached. Those decisions ranged from decentralization of the Government to the enactment of legislation covering all facets of the society.

My Government has attached high priority to the implementation of the decisions of the national conference, since it has helped produce an agenda which complements that of the Government and identifies issues and measures as well as courses of action that could be adopted for the stability and development of Liberia.

President Taylor is aware that the key to Liberia's stability and development lies in fostering genuine reconciliation among Liberians. A human rights commission established since the inception of the Government continues to function. The protection of human rights will remain one of the cornerstones of Liberia's domestic policy. This is why my Government has now undertaken legislative action to ratify and accede to all human rights instruments as a concrete attestation of our commitment to promote and protect human rights in Liberia.

Convinced that democracy is indispensable for development, the Government has also undertaken measures to realize its intention to build institutions to consolidate the democratic process in the country. We have encouraged the continued existence and growth of the 13 political parties that participated in the last elections. We hold regular consultations with these parties concerning national issues. We believe that these efforts are necessary for the dynamic development of a modern Liberia. Meanwhile, international support remains a necessity in order for Liberia to find its way forward and consolidate the gains made by the return to civilian, constitutional rule.

Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter vests the Security Council with the authority to decide what measures may be taken to maintain or restore international peace and security, following a determination of the existence of any threat to peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression.

In a number of cases, the imposition of a sanctions regime or embargo by the Council has yielded, with minimal collateral harm, the results for which punitive measures were authorized. However, in other cases, sanctions have led to grave and intolerable humanitarian crises which have deprived large numbers of innocent and vulnerable persons, mainly women and children, of their most basic needs, while not achieving their intended objectives.

Within this context, the Government of Liberia believes that any sanctions regime should clearly define the punitive measure, its specific target, a definite time-frame and exemptions to mitigate the unintended harmful consequences for the whole population of a given country and those of contiguous States.

In 1992, during Liberia's civil war, the ECOWAS subregional grouping imposed an arms embargo on Liberia as a means to facilitate the peace process and reduce the level of violence. ECOWAS also further

appealed to the Security Council to facilitate the universal application of the embargo, an appeal the Security Council heeded positively by adopting a resolution imposing an arms embargo on Liberia.

By 1997, the Liberian civil war was brought to an end through the process of a negotiated political settlement, disarmament, demobilization and the holding of free and fair democratic elections. After the inauguration of the elected and constitutional Government, ECOWAS lifted all sanctions and embargoes imposed against Liberia and called upon the international community to do the same.

The Government of Liberia, since its assumption of office, has repeatedly called upon the Security Council to lift the arms embargo, an appeal that has fallen on deaf ears. The Liberian Government has a constitutional responsibility and a sovereign right to defend, protect and preserve the independence and territorial integrity of the Republic.

We strongly believe that the arms embargo currently in force against Liberia is patently unfair since it is open-ended and provides no criteria for the lifting of the embargo, as has been the procedure in other, similar cases. Moreover, the intent and purpose of the 1992 arms embargo have been achieved by the peaceful resolution of the Liberian civil crisis through the holding of democratic elections in Liberia and the installation of the Government headed by President Charles Taylor on 2 August 1997.

As a responsible member of the international community, Liberia would accede to the wishes of the Security Council if it were decided that there was justification for the maintenance of sanctions against Liberia based on concrete facts or a violation of international law or covenants. However, to do so under a sanctions regime that no longer has validity is unwarranted and inimical to the interests of the country.

The Government of Liberia requests that the Security Council take cognizance of Liberia's legitimate aspirations and constitutional obligation to its people. It should be noted that in spite of the support of the Liberian people for their Government, there may remain some disgruntled citizens and external actors who seek to disturb the peace and reverse the progress achieved thus far by capitalizing on the perceived inability of the Government to adequately protect itself because of the present arms embargo on the country. For the Security Council to place a Member State of this Organization in such an untenable position is inimical to the interests of the Liberian Government and people and inconsistent with the purposes and principles of the United Nations.

The Government of Liberia calls on the Security Council to impartially assume its responsibility under the Charter by expeditiously redressing what is considered to be an injustice to Liberia by lifting its 1992 arms embargo, imposed on the country for the reasons already mentioned.

At the threshold of the twenty-first century, it must be recognized that the full achievement of the goals and objectives of this Organization has been largely undermined by the long period of the cold war. Its demise held out the promise of a peace dividend that was to be applied to the development activities of the United Nations.

Regrettably, that is not the case today. However, within a renewed, principled spirit of interdependence, the international community can evolve an effective means of partnership and cooperation to achieve equity in the areas of economic development and social advancement as necessary conditions for the maintenance of global peace and security.

By so doing, we will have crafted a workable agenda that will propel the human family into the new millennium with the hope of a just world order that is responsive to the needs of all inhabitants of our common planet, as envisaged in the Charter.

Let me give the assurance that Liberia remains committed to this basic goal in the same determined manner as when it signed the Charter of the United Nations in 1945.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Bahrain, His Excellency Shaikh Mohamed Bin Mubarak Al-Khalifa, on whom I now call.

Mr. Al-Khalifa (Bahrain) (*interpretation from Arabic*): At the outset, I am pleased to extend to Mr. Opertti my sincere congratulations on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. I am confident that his experience and skill will help ensure that we achieve the best results possible in our proceedings this session.

I should also like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko for his

notable success in guiding the proceedings of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. It am also pleased to express thanks and appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his unceasing efforts to reform the United Nations and to enhance its credibility while strengthening its role in maintaining world peace and security.

The aspirations of the world's peoples and States to achieve stability based on security, peace, prosperity and advancement, which are basic objectives of the international community, impose upon us the duty, year after year, to take a realistic account, in this international forum, of the configurations of international realities for which the United Nations serves as the most credible gauge and the most comprehensive reference point for changes in various fields. This would enable us to assess together how close we are to, or how far we are from, our basic human objectives.

Developments in recent months and weeks in various parts of the world, and their implications and effects at different international levels, have demonstrated that, despite all the efforts made, this world is a long way from achieving the stability desired. They also demonstrate that no single Power, nation or bloc, however powerful or influential, can distance or protect itself from instability, which is rampant in the world, unless situations in the north, south, east and west are approached in a unified, consensual and fair manner and with balance and interdependence. This must be done in order to radically solve problems and issues, addressing their root causes and avoiding double standards and partial or temporary solutions, and without deferring seemingly chronic problems that are bound to rear their heads again in one form or another.

The failure of the international community to take proper advantage of the end of the cold war has been made manifest by the nuclear arms race erupting in Asia, obstacles in the Middle East peace process, the rise of terrorism and other acts of violence committed indiscriminately in various parts of the world, as well as the worsening of economic crises in several regions.

The international situation is once again precarious, and it is incumbent upon all of us to treat these matters comprehensively, and with greater firmness and determination. The increased gravity of the phenomenon of terrorism on the one hand, and the divergence of views regarding that phenomenon on the other, underline the need for greater international understanding and more effective joint coordination. This calls for the need to convene an international conference at the highest possible level to combat terrorism, for it is illogical to condemn terrorism at one level, while giving haven to persons involved in it at another level. Such an enormous task cannot be undertaken by any single State or bloc alone, whatever resources it may have. Thus we are once again faced with an enormous and renewed responsibility placed on the shoulders of our international Organization, which has now been required, in the light of the new conditions and the profound changes in the international environment, to adopt effective and unconventional working methods so as to confront these new and unprecedented situations in the history of humankind.

This bestows a renewed importance and should also give new impetus to both the United Nations reform programme put forward by the Secretary-General last year and to approaches to reactivating the performance of the Security Council in line with more effective formulas for its restructuring and functioning which may be acceptable to the international community within the United Nations. These formulas should take into account equitable geographical distribution and an appropriate increase in the Council's membership, commensurate with the increase in the Organization's membership. Bahrain takes pride in the fact that at present it is the representative of the Asian Group in the Security Council.

Experience has shown that the end of an era, or victory in a confrontation, does not mean the end of crises or confrontations in the world, and that continuous international vigilance and permanent joint action are indispensable if we are to avoid inertia and prevent the recurrence of such crises. Creative visions and innovative methods to deal with new challenges are required. That does not mean that we have reached the end of history, as some have imagined. Rather, it means that we have reached an unprecedented phase of history on the practical and political plane of the international situation.

Insofar as the theoretical and intellectual aspects are concerned, it is a fact that — however numerous may be the views and interpretations in research and discussions in the world's different cultures and civilizations that have captured the attention of the world in an unprecedented manner in respect of the "globalization" phenomenon and its dimensions and possible impacts, both positive and negative — the United Nations, established over half a century ago, remains the indisputable mother institution for this phenomenon. The

United Nations represents an early concretization of globalization in world history, despite the fact that globalization was not then as mature or comprehensive as it is today.

If there is to be a global focal point qualified to carry out balanced and objective research on the dimensions of this phenomenon whose impact is yet to be agreed upon, this international Organization should be the common melting pot for the various visions and diverging interpretations concerning the globalization of the international scene, irrespective of the cultural, intellectual and spiritual directions of their proponents. This should also be achieved in a manner whereby the fashionable phrase "clash of civilizations" can be transcended and replaced by harmony and dialogue.

Should the United Nations, with its institutions and intellect, be unable to absorb this international phenomenon and its consequences for human and international reality, this may lead to a different global reality that is incompatible with the spirit and philosophy of the Organization. The result of such a situation might in the long run become difficult to contain and control within the bounds of international legitimacy and existing international cooperation, as attested to by the increase in acts of terrorism and the breaches of established norms in more than one field.

It goes without saying that the United Nations will be unable to meet historical and future obligations of this magnitude, without adequate support from all its Member States, whether at the level of financial obligations, practical facilities or, more importantly, political support for its programmes and plans. In the final analysis, the United Nations is merely the sum total of the joint political will of Member States. This sum total, be it positive or negative, is but an expression of the capacity of that political will to undertake joint international action.

In spite of the apprehensions and risks that loom over the international horizon, the future for the third millennium is laden with promises, hopes and potentials that are worthy of sacrifice and hard work for the sake of a better future.

Accruing scientific and technological advancement, the increasing speed of communications and the information revolution, the spread of free trade and the deepening interaction among nations, cultures and civilizations are all harbingers of a better world for all mankind.

As it witnesses these positive new developments on the world scene, Bahrain, with its deep-rooted civilization, is hardly a stranger to this.

Five thousand years ago, Bahrain was one of the most important commercial ports in the world. By virtue of its openness, based as it was on freedom of commerce, it constituted a meeting place for cultures and human thought. Since that early time, by symbolizing the heritage of the old world regarding coexistence and interaction between human contributions, it became qualified to be an island for peace and to be a civic and spiritual centre in its natural and human environment in the Arabian Gulf. The existing legacy of its old civilization bears witness to that.

Consequently, and since the beginning of its current renaissance, Bahrain has sought to meet the requirements of modern advancement in the areas of administration and management, educational and cultural enlightenment and the creation of an open and civilized society that is capable of evolution based primarily on the Bahraini individual's innovation, capabilities and basic rights to a free and honourable life. It has thus become a model for balanced modernization that preserves the traditions of our region of the world.

By virtue of this distinctive role, the State of Bahrain, small in size as it is, today bears a hefty regional and international responsibility on three levels simultaneously: first, in its capacity as the financial and banking centre of one of the world's most important economic areas; secondly, in its capacity as a fundamental link at the forefront of the joint defence strategy of that vital region of the world — as has been the case continuously over the last half-century, coinciding with the history of the United Nations; and thirdly, in its capacity as a social, cultural and civic model that has, since the beginning of this century, been open to modern thought and reforms and to progressive human development for both men and women equally in various fields of education and work, and in responsible social and national partnership. This has been reflected in this year's United Nations Development Programme *Human Development Report*. That report placed Bahrain first in the Arab world for the fourth consecutive year, for its achievements in human development. Furthermore, the accomplishments in the field of economic and industrial development in Bahrain reflect model diversification of the means of production, which goes beyond an exclusive dependence on oil.

As it takes part in the United Nations celebrations marking the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Bahrain in fact does so as a reflection of its real and historic contribution to the building of the social, educational and developmental foundations for these basic human rights — the very core of the general structure of society — in a manner that transcends slogans and efforts to politicize this venerable human issue. In addressing this issue, due consideration should be given to the historical and legislative peculiarities and values of every society, religion and culture, so that the outlook of one system cannot predominate over the legitimate and unique outlook of another.

The United Nations played a positive role in defusing the crisis between Iraq and the international inspection teams earlier this year. The State of Bahrain welcomed the Memorandum of Understanding reached between the Secretary-General and the Iraqi Government. In view of our keen interest in the preservation of security and peace in the Gulf region, we applaud the effective role undertaken by the Secretary-General in defusing the crisis and sparing the region from dangerous ramifications and consequences. We wish to reaffirm the need for Iraq to continue fulfilling its international obligations concerning the elimination of weapons of mass destruction and the release of Kuwaiti and other prisoners of war and detainees. Any progress in this respect should be recognized as a first step towards the alleviation of the suffering of the brotherly Iraqi people. The State of Bahrain has always emphasized the need for ensuring the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq and the rejection of any interference in its internal affairs.

The continued occupation by the Islamic Republic of Iran of the three islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb, which belong to the United Arab Emirates, remains a cause of concern to the State of Bahrain and the other sister members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. We hope that ongoing contacts between the sisterly United Arab Emirates and the Islamic Republic of Iran will lead to the settlement of the question of these islands by means of serious bilateral negotiations and other available peaceful means for the settlement of disputes among States through reconciliation.

As far as the general situation in the Gulf is concerned, we, of course, welcome the easing of tension and the progress toward rapprochement and dialogue between the States members of the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Islamic Republic of Iran as being in the interest of all their peoples and of the preservation of peace in that region.

The painful events in the Gulf region during the last two decades explain why the question of regional security remains one to which the State of Bahrain accords the utmost importance in view of its serious ramifications and repercussions in relation to the security, stability and safety of the States and peoples of the region. The territorial and boundary claims currently seen in the Gulf region, which aim at changing established and traditionally accepted boundaries, upset the security and stability of the region. In our view, the optimal and most judicious course for avoiding that scenario is to respect the status quo, to refrain from all claims, total or partial, and to settle any related differences by peaceful means acceptable to the parties to the dispute. The establishment of relations among the States of the region on the basis of good-neighbourliness, mutual respect, non-interference in the internal affairs of others and recognition of every State's national sovereignty are also fundamental elements for the maintenance of security and stability in the region.

Regarding the Middle East peace process, this year has not witnessed any positive developments or progress, despite all the efforts to move the process forward. We believe that the lack of progress in the peace process will lead to an escalation of tension, extremism and violence in the region. Having supported the peace process since its very beginnings at the Madrid Conference as a strategic option for the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region, Bahrain is deeply concerned at the stalemate in the peace process resulting from the Israeli Government's insistence on following policies of procrastination, non-compliance with commitments previously agreed upon with the Palestinian Authority, and construction of more settlements both in Holy Jerusalem and in the Syrian Golan. That is in addition to the continued confiscation of land in the occupied Palestinian territories. Therefore, we call upon the international community, and in particular the two co-sponsors of the peace process, to intensify efforts to rescue the faltering process, prevent its failure and put it back on the right course on all tracks so that just and comprehensive peace may be attained on the basis of the principle of land for peace, the return to their owners of the Palestinian territories, including in the first place Holy Jerusalem, recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent State of its own on its national territory, complete withdrawal by Israel from the occupied Syrian Arab Golan to the

borders that existed on 4 June 1967, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and the unconditional withdrawal from occupied southern Lebanon in accordance with Council resolution 425 (1978).

With regard to the question of disarmament relevant to weapons of mass destruction, it should be recalled that Israel continues to avoid accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and a commitment to end a nuclear arms race in the region. Such a position is apt to force other States to enter such a race, as has happened in South Asia, and as could happen anywhere in the world.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the world's multilateral trading system. Since the system was established, numerous rounds of multilateral trade negotiations contributed to the creation of the World Trade Organization. We hope that the forthcoming round of trade negotiations, expected to begin before the end of the century, will lead to the creation of an environment conducive to the development and diversification of world trade, and to the enhancement of economic and commercial cooperation among States on the basis of equality and reciprocal benefits.

The financial crisis that has afflicted a number of States and regions has caused economic tremors and has visibly affected the economies of numerous States, thus affirming the interdependence of the world economic system. In view of the consequences of this crisis, the international community must pay special attention to the treatment of economic factors that have a bearing on world growth rates and find effective solutions to them.

It is our view that dialogue and cooperation between States of the North and of the South with a view to addressing world economic conditions would enhance world economic stability, lead to a greater flow of financial resources for development purposes and solve problems related to indebtedness, transfer of technology and the promotion of international investment.

Environmental issues constitute a challenge that will face mankind during the twenty-first century. Concerted international efforts will be called for to address and prevent the dangers related to that challenge. Accordingly, the State of Bahrain has endorsed the Protocol adopted by the third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held last December at Kyoto, Japan. We look forward to the fulfilment by the developed countries of their obligations under that Protocol.

On the threshold of the twenty-first century, we view assertion of the importance of one civilization at the expense of others as incongruous at the dawning of a new era, an era based on peaceful coexistence between civilizations, their integration, their mutual enrichment, and their interaction with one another on an equal footing. The experience of the United Nations since its establishment has shown that variety and diversity of cultures are means towards fusion and harmony rather than towards antagonism and divisiveness. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us, during the forthcoming period, to build relations among all nations, peoples, States and cultures on the basis of cooperation, consensus and understanding, rather than confrontation, hegemony or collision. Let us together promote close and enduring ties among peoples and cultures in a world of interdependence and fraternity. Let national and cultural pluralism be elements of fruitful solidarity and mutual understanding in the creation of an era of peace and tranquillity.

This Organization, which over the last 50 years has guided mankind towards better understanding and greater cooperation and coordination, is capable of pursuing its historic role and undertaking a positive role in the ongoing evolution of the international community throughout the next century. It is thus no exaggeration to say that the world has never before witnessed as historic a juncture as this, where it needs a joint international vision and concerted international action with a view to crossing to the shore of safety for which we all yearn.

Address by Mr. Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland.

Mr. Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland, was escorted to the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland, His Excellency Mr. Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Dlamini (Swaziland): I come with the greetings and warm wishes of His Majesty King Mswati III, Her Majesty the Indlovukazi, the Queen Mother, the Government and the whole Swazi nation to all our fellow members of the United Nations.

On behalf of the Kingdom of Swaziland, I would like to extend our warmest congratulations to Mr. Opertti on his unanimous election to the presidency of the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. We have the fullest confidence in his ability to lead the deliberations of this session, and I can assure him of my delegation's full support and cooperation.

I would like to congratulate his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, on the skill with which he presided over the fifty-second session.

I would also like to commend the work done over the past 12 months by our Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, and the staff of the United Nations Secretariat. We have been impressed by the strength of their commitment to meet the many challenges facing our Organization, and we take pride in their considerable achievements.

The Kingdom of Swaziland is encouraged by the progress that has been achieved in the reform of the United Nations. Much credit is due to the Secretary-General and his staff for their implementation of cost-cutting measures and the commitment they have shown to creating a more efficient Organization.

For our part, we believe the membership must provide the financial resources for the Organization to carry out the tasks that we ourselves have set. We surely cannot expect the United Nations to meet its existing obligations, let alone take on the new challenges we present to it, if we lag behind in the payment of our dues. The Kingdom of Swaziland makes every effort to keep up to date with its financial obligations in full, on time and without conditions — and we appeal to all our fellow Member States to do the same.

The Kingdom of Swaziland is nevertheless concerned at the painfully slow rate of progress in the debate on the restructuring of the Security Council. The delay is especially frustrating when we know that there is global consensus on the need to make the permanent membership of the Council more democratic and representative of the developing world. This issue has been central to discussions during Non-Aligned Movement summit meetings and successive meetings of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). There continues to be unanimous support for change.

In this regard, the Kingdom of Swaziland continues to support the African common position, which calls, among other things, for membership of the Security Council to be based on an equitable geographical formula. Africa is calling for two permanent seats, with the full voting and veto rights that are enjoyed by the current membership. However, in the longer term, we believe that the right of veto should be the subject of review, as it is not in accordance with recognized democratic practices since it gives unequal weight to the minority view.

As we celebrate the thirtieth year of our independence and the thirtieth birthday of our monarch, the Kingdom of Swaziland is continuing quietly and peacefully to develop all aspects of life according to the wishes and expectations of our people. Our overall aim is to raise the living standards of all our people and to ensure that access to all the basic requirements of decent human life is available to all. We have conducted a number of initiatives aimed at identifying the areas of highest priority for action and we have asked the people themselves to contribute their ideas and views on how we can overcome the challenges we face. We have always believed that sustainable development will be best achieved in our country when there is the involvement, support and understanding of the whole nation. It is for this reason that we continue to consult the people on issues of national importance at open forums, thus giving all Swazis the opportunity to make their views known and have them considered.

The implementation of our development aims involves a twin-track approach, with an economic and social reform agenda covering the shorter term, and a national development strategy to provide an action plan for the next 25 years. Both are the result of the recommendations of the Swazi people themselves and reflect the wishes of all Swazis.

In a similar vein, and again in response to the people's request, we are conducting a review of our Constitution. His Majesty informed the General Assembly last year of the establishment of the Constitutional Review Commission. The whole nation is engaged in this vitally important exercise, and I am pleased to inform our fellow Members that substantial progress has been made over the past 12 months. The end result will truly reflect the will of the people themselves, and we are confident

that we will have in place a Constitution that will serve the best interests of all Swazis for many generations to come.

We have been most grateful for the support we have received from the United Nations towards these important nation-building processes, and we value highly the continued support and encouragement from many of our friends and partners in the international community with respect to our development efforts.

In common with almost every country, we find that the issue of unemployment remains our greatest challenge. We recognize that, with the global economic situation deteriorating and the gap between the developed and the developing countries widening, the task of creating jobs is becoming more and more difficult. In response to this, we have introduced incentives to attract investment from both internal and external sources, and we have established an investment promotion authority to act as the catalyst for rapid investment growth. Such national initiatives are aimed at creating favourable conditions for our people to gain a decent standard of living and to continue to enjoy the peace and stability with which we have been blessed throughout our history.

We have noted with regret that the past 12 months have seen an alarming rise in situations of internal conflict and external aggression among many of the Member States. Furthermore, there are many instances of situations where internal conflicts have spilled over borders, creating the potential for regional instability. The situations in the Kosovo region of Yugoslavia, and the heightened tension on the border between Iran and Afghanistan, are just two examples which are of great concern to the international community.

This worrying trend has resulted in valuable global resources being channelled away from economic and social development priorities, and has undermined our collective efforts to achieve peace and stability throughout the world.

All too many of our fellow human beings are caught up in a spiral of seemingly unending violence, with millions forced into exile from their own homes, thus becoming the latest statistics among the unfortunate numbers of refugees. In this respect, we urge the international community to continue to improve its response mechanisms so that appropriate action is taken quickly and decisively to prevent conflict and to repair the misery caused by it.

In a similar vein, the stalling of the peace process in the Middle East continues to frustrate the efforts of those who desire a genuine, lasting peace in that troubled region. The Kingdom of Swaziland applauds those nations which are working hard to get the process back on track, and we continue to urge those involved to respect the terms of the Oslo peace accord as the only basis on which to rebuild the atmosphere of trust which is so necessary for the process to move forward.

Meanwhile, on our continent of Africa, the conflicts in areas including the Horn of Africa and in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola, Lesotho and Guinea-Bissau, are challenging to the full the diplomatic skills of all of us in the international community who hope to bring lasting peace to our continent.

Of particular concern to us in the southern African region has been the renewal of civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the resumption of hostilities in Angola and the very recent disturbances in Lesotho. Our fellow members will recall the efforts of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), among others, to find a solution to the distressing situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola, which are hampering cooperation between member States of the community. In the case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Kingdom of Swaziland believes that the United Nations has a role to play as peacemaker to complement the efforts of SADC and the OAU.

In all cases, we pray that a solution may be found to end the bloodshed, establish a lasting ceasefire and allow negotiations between the opposing sides. We pray that sustainable solutions may soon be found to all of Africa's conflict situations and that all our fellow Africans may be free from the sufferings endured by so many for so long.

The Kingdom of Swaziland applauds the remarkable progress made towards a lasting settlement in Northern Ireland. We know there is still a long way to go, but, given the centuries-long history of the Troubles, the achievement has been all the more impressive. We also commend those who have contributed to the process, and we salute especially the people of Northern Ireland, who chose to take their destiny in their own hands and voted for peace. This provides an excellent example of what is possible when there is true commitment to peace from all sides in a dispute.

Our continent's fresh crises have shown once more that Africa needs to be better prepared to head off potential conflicts through timely dialogue and negotiation, and to have available a pool of peacekeepers to act where necessary.

The Kingdom of Swaziland welcomes the Secretary-General's report to the Security Council regarding the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa.

In this regard, we support the concept of an integrated approach to conflict resolution on our continent as a way of enhancing closer cooperation between Africa and the rest of the world and making the best use of the resources at our disposal.

The Kingdom of Swaziland is already engaged in efforts to become more involved in conflict resolution. To this end, we have welcomed the support of the United Kingdom and of the United States of America towards the preparation of our defence force for participation in peacekeeping operations in Africa and around the world.

Of particular concern has been the evidence in the past year of the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and their use as instruments of aggression and intimidation. We in the Kingdom of Swaziland reaffirm the view of the Non-Aligned Movement that there can be no moral justification for the ownership, manufacture or use of such weapons.

We join the majority of States Members of the United Nations in calling for real commitment by all countries to global disarmament and to the creation of a world that will be free and safe for future generations. In this respect, we urge all nations that have not done so to become parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

It may be said that the crises we have mentioned so far have been the result of man's worst qualities and therefore unnecessary and avoidable. The same is not true of the many natural disasters that have struck hard at nations across the globe, irrespective of development status.

The "El Niño" phenomenon has resulted in a series of natural disasters, the latest example being widespread flooding throughout the Americas, Asia, Africa and parts of Europe. Meanwhile, ironically, we in southern Africa must wait once more to see if we will receive sufficient rain for our crops this year.

The establishment by the United Nations of the Office of Humanitarian Affairs could not have come at a more opportune time, and the Kingdom of Swaziland gives its full support for its operations. We hope that its role will include assistance to Member States to develop emergency relief mechanisms so that we may all be better prepared to cope with disasters of all kinds in the future.

The Secretary-General recently gave warning of the deteriorating global economic situation and the widening gap between rich and poor nations. The crisis in Asia has had a devastating effect on the people of that region, and now all the indications are that the economies of the rest of the world will also be adversely affected. The two certainties are that the worst is yet to come, and that it will be the developing world that will be hardest hit.

In this interdependent world of ours, the Kingdom of Swaziland recognizes the importance of the concept of partnership between nations. We agree that no nation can afford to remain isolated and that there is an obligation — and an economic necessity — for the more developed countries to support and assist those of us in the developing world.

We believe that the underlying principle of any partnership should be one of mutual respect and understanding of each partner's views, beliefs and position. We look forward to working with our partners in areas that our people have chosen as their development priorities, in an atmosphere of trust and openness, and free from the imposition of conditions that can impact negatively on our capacity to improve.

The process of globalization is now well advanced. The Kingdom of Swaziland believes that a good deal more time and preparation are needed before we in the developing world are ready to cope with the additional responsibilities that globalization will bring.

The United Nations provides the ideal forum for discussion of these matters; let us make full use of our Organization, in an atmosphere of true respect between partners, so that the positions of all may be understood and appreciated.

As we celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Kingdom of Swaziland appreciates the efforts of the

United Nations to integrate human rights issues into all its policies and programmes.

The Kingdom of Swaziland has taken and continues to take seriously its obligations to its people on human rights issues. Furthermore, we support all initiatives aimed at improving the status of women, youth and children. They have a vital role to play in the development of a nation in all aspects of life. The ongoing constitutional review is, *inter alia*, promoting the debate on human rights issues.

It is unfortunate to note that, even as we celebrate 50 years of existence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there is one nation of 21.8 million people that we believe is denied the right of membership of the United Nations. I am referring to the question of the Republic of China on Taiwan.

The Kingdom of Swaziland continues to raise this issue because of our conviction that the United Nations Charter provides for the representation of all nations of the world. Furthermore, the Republic of China on Taiwan has shown very clearly that it is a nation with the willingness and capacity to play a prominent and responsible role in global development affairs, and yet it remains excluded from the activities of the one truly global development organization.

The principle of universality, as contained in our founding Charter, provides that all citizens of the world have the right to be heard in these chambers, and yet it is a fact that as I speak the people of the Republic of China on Taiwan are not represented here and therefore cannot contribute their resources and expertise for the benefit of the international community through the medium of the United Nations.

The Republic of China on Taiwan has shown itself to be a peace-loving nation, with a high level of political, economic and social development. It has an excellent record of supporting development activities throughout the world. The Kingdom of Swaziland believes that the time has now come to restore its rightful membership of the United Nations to the Republic of China on Taiwan. We join the rest of our fellow members in proposing a review of this issue, with full regard for the change in circumstances since the decision was taken in 1971 which led to the expulsion of the Republic of China on Taiwan from our Organization.

The problem of drug abuse and trafficking is a relatively new phenomenon among the people of Swaziland, but it is fast becoming a major threat to the development of our country, particularly among our youth, who seem to be the easiest target.

The Kingdom of Swaziland welcomed the special session of the General Assembly on drugs, held in June this year, as a timely and necessary initiative. We therefore have high expectations of the recommendations that emerged from the special session, and we commit ourselves fully to their implementation. We recognize, though, that the drug trade is cross-border and international in nature, and we are working closely with our neighbours and regional partners to share ideas and resources in a combined effort to prevent the spread of the drug trade.

The Kingdom of Swaziland condemns international terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. We believe there can be no justification for the type of outrage that was witnessed recently in Nairobi, Kenya; Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania; and Cape Town, South Africa. The deaths of so many innocent people can surely bring no credit to — and win no support for — those who planned and committed the deeds. Our prayers are offered again for the victims and their families and to all whose lives have been affected by the evils of terrorism. We support all moves to bring the perpetrators to justice and to prevent the spread of the use of terrorism tactics.

In this regard, the Kingdom of Swaziland welcomes the establishment of the International Criminal Court following the Rome Conference. We believe it to be well timed and justified, and we are of the view that the international nature of terrorism and drug-trafficking make it essential that they be included as crimes that will fall under the jurisdiction of the Court. We are confident that the General Assembly will give urgent priority to the establishment of the Preparatory Commission so that the Court itself will become operational in the shortest possible time.

The United Nations remains the only global forum in which the world can have any hope of achieving the goals we all strive for. Peace and stability among all nations, promotion of sustainable development for all, and the hope of future prosperity and security for all our peoples: these are the wishes and expectations of those we represent here.

Our peoples look to this Organization to create the right conditions for these things to be possible. We cannot let them down. I give my assurance that the

Kingdom of Swaziland will work hard to support the Secretary-General and his staff in their efforts to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the United Nations operations. We are deeply grateful for the assistance given by the United Nations in support of the initiatives we are undertaking in our country.

Finally, on behalf of His Majesty the King, Her Majesty the Indlovukazi, the Queen Mother, the Government and the whole Swazi nation, I am proud to take this opportunity to reaffirm the Kingdom's commitment to the ideals and aims of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Barnabas Sibusiso Dlamini, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Swaziland, was escorted from the rostrum.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Andrei Gabriel Plesu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Romania.

Mr. Plesu (Romania) (*interpretation from French*): It gives me particular pleasure to congratulate Mr. Opertti most warmly on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. Please allow me also to join those who have expressed their appreciation for the work done by the former President, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, during the past session.

Since this is the first time that I am taking the floor in this Assembly, I would like to express to Secretary-General Kofi Annan our highest consideration and support for his activity, especially for his efforts in promoting reform of and a new image for the United Nations.

Romania believes that the role of the United Nations in contemporary international life remains essential, given that, in the face of the new challenges to international security, we can react in a coherent and efficient manner only under the guidance of a unique system of values, such as that of the generally accepted principles of the United Nations Charter, whose validity remains indisputable.

My country desires to participate actively in the process of redefining the role of the United Nations and of modernizing its functioning, and it supports the reform of the Organization as a whole.

The beneficial role of United Nations preventive diplomacy, demonstrated these past years, as well as the new approaches regarding humanitarian aid, peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction, are eloquent examples of the usefulness of joint, coordinated action at the global level. Romania is actively involved in promoting these concepts and trends and is participating, to the extent of its capacity, in peacekeeping and peace-building operations. The participation of Romanian soldiers in United Nations peacekeeping missions in Bosnia, Angola, Kuwait, Somalia or Rwanda represents our contribution to the implementation of these concepts.

The political will of Romania to act as a factor of stability on the international level was proved once more yesterday when we signed a memorandum of understanding with the United Nations regarding stand-by arrangements. This event, furthermore, supplements the recent accession of Romania to the Multinational United Nations Standby Forces High-Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG). The experience acquired in peacekeeping operations has highlighted the need to consolidate United Nations rapid reaction capacity.

Romania is profoundly concerned about the conflict situations on the agenda of the Security Council and would like to take this opportunity to advocate, once more, dialogue among the parties concerned, in order to facilitate solutions negotiated by those directly involved in the conflict.

It is essential not to lose the momentum for dialogue likely to lead to peace, because there is always a right moment for peace, just as there is also sometimes, unfortunately, a time which can lead to conflict. For example, in our view the Middle East today is facing a unique chance for peace. If the parties involved do not take advantage of this opportunity, the crisis might continue indefinitely. Let us do our utmost to avoid an unfortunate "too late" situation. We were on the verge of acting too late in Bosnia, in Northern Ireland, and we still run this risk in Kosovo.

The evolution of the crisis in Kosovo remains extremely worrying. Romania continues to stand for the peaceful settlement of this conflict, and we support the efforts of the international community in this direction, including those of the Contact Group, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union, the

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe. Beyond all doubt, the countries in the region must be constantly consulted regarding measures that are to be taken for the settlement of the conflict.

The Balkans and, in a broader sense, South-Eastern Europe have, *inter alia*, an image problem. The inventory of local disputes gets more attention than the inventory of real success stories. We forget that a number of these countries have managed to make the transition from dictatorships and centralized economies to democracies and market economies. It is a difficult process but one courageously undertaken by these countries. It is true that it is always up to them to improve their political image — not by falsifying it, but on the contrary by rendering it more exact. There is the need for a certain regional pride, for a legitimate aspiration to show the world not only the spectre of intraregional conflicts, but also a promising economic and cultural potential that deserves every consideration and encouragement.

Romania is particularly concerned about the still unresolved conflict situation in the eastern region of the Republic of Moldova. We believe that there are serious reasons for concern about the lack of progress in solving the two major problems of this region — namely, the withdrawal of foreign troops from the territory of the Republic of Moldova, and the negotiation of the political status of the eastern region of the Republic of Moldova. We support the need for the resumption of negotiations on the status of this region and the urgent implementation of the 1994 agreement on the withdrawal of the 14th Russian Army from the territory of the Republic of Moldova.

We believe that the United Nations Security Council will continue to play a crucial role in the maintenance of international peace and security. We support the reform of the Council and want to have the discussions continued on equitable representation in the Council and an increase in its membership, with a view to finding generally acceptable solutions. Our approach is also aimed at obtaining an additional non-permanent seat for the Group of Eastern European States.

In the context of increasingly diverse challenges to international security and the prevalence of non-military risks, the role of the United Nations in other fields — economic, social and legal — is becoming more important than ever. The economic and social dimensions of United Nations activities offer even more opportunities for a coherent and efficient management of dialogue and cooperation on global economic and social issues.

Mr. Ba-Jammal (Yemen), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The high-level dialogue which recently took place in New York on the economic and social impact of globalization re-emphasized the need for a coordinated approach to economic interdependence and other dimensions of international security. An effective response to the present challenges requires the participation of all States, as well as international financial and commercial institutions, in order to reach a new global financial balance.

In a world of growing interdependence, the assistance provided by the United Nations system is a good example of the coordinated way in which we can address the various problems confronting us. Romania is developing effective cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other funds and programmes within the new United Nations development assistance framework. The Romanian Government would like to benefit more from United Nations assistance in priority fields in support of domestic reforms.

This year, the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights gives me this very pleasant opportunity to refer to the human dimension of our activity. It also provides us all with an opportunity to reflect more broadly upon the interdependencies which exist between human rights and peace, development and democracy.

Romania supports the role played by the United Nations in asserting the universal nature of human rights and in consolidating the international system for the protection of these rights in collaboration with Governments and civil society.

We also wish to contribute to an active and efficient United Nations involvement in the fight against terrorism, organized crime and illicit drug-trafficking. In this respect, we must take into account the fact that the global character of these new threats requires a global approach so that mankind can tackle them in a responsible way. We cannot afford the luxury of replacing effective action by endless debate or compassion by contemptuous judgement.

We should condemn terrorism without speaking of terrorist peoples or countries. We should condemn fanaticism without claiming that there are fanatic religions or denominations. We should encourage dialogue and not confrontation, solidarity and not segregation. We have to work for the unity of Europe without instituting various degrees of "Europeanism", which could lead to arbitrary divisions that separate and exclude rather than unite. We have to encourage the spirit of cooperation and mutual aid and not the tendency to pass judgement on others. We should not judge States for the undignified deeds of certain citizens, nor peoples for the historic accidents imposed on them by abusive leaders or barbarian ideologies. We should also refrain from condemning those who have different views from ours and should not use the name of democracy to encourage confusion between public affairs and private, between the values of pomp and sincerity, between honesty and demagogy. We should not add to the confusion of the world by an ostentatious relativization of acquired traditions and values.

In this context, Romania reaffirms its attachment to the concepts of multiculturalism and tolerance of all kinds. Allow me to recall that an international conference organized by the community of Sant'Egidio was recently held in Bucharest on the topic of peoples and religions. Representatives of all the major religions and denominations of the world participated in this meeting. As mentioned in the message of Pope John Paul II, the success of the meeting testified to Romania's mission as "an interface between East and West, offering a genuine synthesis of cultures and traditions".

At present, many countries of the world are undergoing the complex and unique experience of regaining democracy. That is why there is great interest in good governance, strengthening democratic institutions and enlarging the participation of civil society in the exercise of democracy.

It gives me great pleasure, in my capacity as Acting Chairman of the Third International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, to bring to the Assembly's attention the fact that the ministerial meeting of the countries participating in that Conference took place a few days ago here at United Nations headquarters. On that occasion, a number of measures were examined concerning the implementation of the recommendations formulated in the document adopted last year in Bucharest. In this respect, we intend to present a draft resolution to the General Assembly with a view to ensuring the follow-up to this process until the next Conference.

Romania highly appreciates the framework provided by the United Nations system, since it allows for the broad participation of all countries in all fields and enables the search for common interests that transcend national pride.

Please allow me to raise a few issues relating to Romania, a country engaged in the broad and difficult process of economic reform. For us, maintaining an international environment that is stable, predictable and stimulating to business and investment is central to fulfilling our economic reform programme.

Romania's fundamental option — that of European reintegration and membership in NATO — is well known. Our political objectives remain unchanged. Even if the rate at which these objectives are achieved varies from one country to another, we have no alternative. As we strive to replace one system by another, we are encountering all the difficulties of transition: low standards of living, the confusion of values, a radical change of mentalities against the backdrop of social and administrative inertia. Everything has become a priority. Everything is compulsory. Everything is urgent. This is why I feel we need the support and encouragement of the international community, to the benefit of democratization and development.

With regard to subregional cooperation, our experience shows that crisis situations are generally seen solely from the political, military and sometimes humanitarian perspectives, but rarely or never from those of economics or civil society. Certainly, there are well-targeted subregional projects, such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation and those relating to transport routes linking the Caspian Sea to Western Europe, the ancient silk route. But we have to recognize that South-Eastern Europe lacks broad economic integrating projects that are assisted by the main international institutions.

In the absence of such economic cooperation projects, our policy is somewhat reactive. We also have to recognize that, in crisis situations, we still focus on effects and not on causes; we try to limit the damage and prevent the spread of the crisis, but do not focus on the prevention of conflict itself.

In our opinion, we should take better advantage of the framework provided by the United Nations system in order to work out development-oriented political strategies, in particular in the economic field. Similar developments — leading, on the one hand, to solidarity

and, on the other, to an ever greater diversity of the problems that confront us — can also be noted in other regions of the world, not only in the Euro-Atlantic space. We have followed them attentively and appreciate the results obtained within the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Southern Cone Common Market, the Association of South-East Asian Nations and other organizations.

Among the priorities established by Romania, it is worth mentioning the objective of developing and diversifying our political and economic relations with countries of other regions, taking into account the complex and dynamic developments of an ever more interdependent world under the impact of globalization.

In conclusion, allow me to assure the Assembly of the commitment of the Romanian delegation to contributing effectively to United Nations activities in various fields towards the successful outcome of the current session. We believe in the capacity of the United Nations to tackle the complex problems facing the international community on the eve of the third millennium.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call on the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Kuwait, His Excellency Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

Mr. Al-Sabah (Kuwait) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to extend to Mr. Opertti and his friendly country, on behalf of the State of Kuwait, our sincere congratulations on his election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. We are confident that his extensive and incisive knowledge of international affairs will greatly help him to guide the Assembly's deliberations to success. Let me assure him of our delegation's willingness and desire to cooperate with him in a businesslike and constructive manner in order to achieve all the objectives of this session.

I also wish to express our appreciation to his predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko, for his remarkable stewardship of the previous session.

Allow me take this opportunity to commend the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his tireless efforts to reform the United Nations, to restructure it, and to streamline and revitalize it in various fields, with a view to making it responsive to the demands and challenges of the twenty-first century. In this regard, we welcome the statement made by the Secretary-General before the general debate, when he presented his report on the work of the Organization. We note with satisfaction that some essential proposals for reform presented by the Secretary-General have been implemented.

We hope that the reform exercise will continue with the full backing of all Member States. The reform of the Organization and the enhancement of its effectiveness for the fulfilment of its objectives and the attainment of its priorities depend in large measure on the political will of Member States and the extent of their commitment to their obligations under the Charter and the resolutions of its various organs. We consider it unrealistic to expect the United Nations to deliver more while we provide less.

Frankly, Kuwait feels that the success of the reform exercise hinges primarily on the availability of adequate funding for the various mandated activities. Such funding depends on the payment by all Member States of their assessed contributions to both the regular budget and the peacekeeping budget. In this regard, I am pleased to report that the State of Kuwait continues to fulfil its financial obligations in full and on time. It is our fervent hope that this obligation will be honoured by all Member States of the Organization.

The reform and restructuring of United Nations organs has become a practical necessity required for the common interest of all Member States. There is no doubt that the circumstances in which the United Nations was established over 50 years ago have changed, and that vast developments which could not be overlooked have occurred at various international and regional levels. Therefore, Kuwait is in favour of restructuring the Security Council so that its composition and membership reflect current political and economic realities. The change should also ensure greater efficiency in the discharge of the primary responsibilities of the Council, as set forth in the Charter, regarding the maintenance of international peace and security.

It is clear now, after five years of debate in the Working Group on the expansion of the membership of the Security Council and the reform of its methods of work, that reaching a consensus on the optimum increase in membership is not an easy matter. Deep differences still exist among Member States. Nonetheless, we remain hopeful that reaching an agreement is still possible. In this context, we wish to emphasize the need to improve the methods and procedures of work of the Council to ensure enhanced transparency and wider involvement in

the decision-making process. The comprehensive paper submitted by the Non-Aligned Movement on 11 March 1997 to the Working Group constitutes an appropriate basis for working out an agreement on the procedures to be adopted and incorporated into the rules of procedure of the Council.

As we stand at the threshold of the twenty-first century, our world is witnessing the emergence of a multitude of problems and issues whose implications transcend national and geographical boundaries. Their inherent dangers can threaten national and international security. Unless curbed, such hazards will undermine the achievements made thus far in the environmental, social and economic spheres. Among such problems — without being exhaustive — are terrorism, the arms race, narcotic drugs, environmental degradation, poverty, human rights violations, massacres and genocide.

In this context, Kuwait wishes to reaffirm its categorical denunciation and rejection of all forms of violence and terrorism, irrespective of their source. We support all collective international efforts to confront this phenomenon, including the apprehension and trial of the perpetrators of these crimes. Kuwait condemns the terrorist acts perpetrated against the United States embassy buildings in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam last August and extends heartfelt condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims of those tragic incidents.

In the area of disarmament, we welcome the progress made thus far with regard to the Convention on the prohibition of chemical weapons, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction.

When we in Kuwait talk about landmines, we have in our minds the bitter memory of the destructive impact of the millions of mines planted throughout Kuwait by the invading Iraqi forces. Those mines claimed the lives of hundreds of innocent children, women and elderly people. It took painstaking efforts, in which many States participated, to remove those mines. Kuwait had to expend great efforts and vast sums on the clearance operations.

We therefore call on the international community to pursue its efforts to eliminate anti-personnel mines. Kuwait also encourages the movement towards curbing the arms race and developing controls and rules that contribute to tension reduction in all volatile and conflict-ridden regions, especially the Middle East, South Asia and the Indian subcontinent.

A significant development in international efforts to combat crimes of genocide and massacres committed during conflicts and wars was the recent adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court in Rome last July. It is our hope that the Court will live up to the legitimate aspirations of the world community in trying all perpetrators of war crimes or crimes against humanity and in serving as an effective deterrent against serious violations of international humanitarian law.

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Kuwait calls for greater consolidation of international efforts, to ensure wider respect for and protection of the human rights consecrated in the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration. We maintain that it is the duty of all States, irrespective of their political, economic or cultural systems, to protect and promote those rights, with a view to ensuring the dignity of the human being and his or her rights to freedom of expression and belief.

In the area of the fight against narcotic drugs, we believe that the efforts of the United Nations and of other competent international institutions to combat this pernicious phenomenon, and to minimize the illicit sale, trade and abuse of drugs should be supported and strengthened. In this regard, we welcome the Political Declaration adopted at the conclusion of the twentieth special session of the General Assembly, held last June. We are hopeful that the steps agreed to then will be translated into effective concrete measures to stem the tide of this phenomenon, which poses severe threats to human health and to the dignity and aspirations of millions of people and their families, as well as to the stability and independence of States.

The State of Kuwait has the honour of holding the chairmanship of the current session of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which was established in 1981. Since its inception, the GCC has been working steadily to fulfil the hopes and aspirations of its peoples, who share a common view of their destiny and future. Leaders of the GCC member States hold annual summits to examine and review a wide range of issues and events that concern the family of the GCC community and have an impact on regional security and stability.

A major issue on the agenda of the summit conferences in this regard is the implementation by Iraq of its obligations set forth in the Security Council resolutions relating to its invasion of the State of Kuwait. Therefore, the Gulf Cooperation Council leaders attached great importance to this question in their last summit, held in December 1997 in Kuwait. The final statement issued by that summit reflected a Gulf vision of the future modalities for establishing peace and stability in the region. It also outlined the conditions that must be met by Iraq in order to enable it to reclaim its normal position within the ranks of the international community. Let me cite the following excerpt from the Gulf Cooperation Council summit statement:

> "The Supreme Council reaffirms the necessity for the Government of Iraq to implement all relevant Security Council resolutions without selectivity, especially those relating to the elimination of weapons of mass destruction that remain in Iraq's possession, the release of Kuwaiti and third country prisoners, the return of all Kuwaiti property and compliance with Security Council resolution 949 (1994) by refraining from any act of aggression or provocation against neighbouring States. It also stresses that the invasion and occupation of the State of Kuwait by Iraq was a breach of inter-Arab and international treaties. Therefore, Iraq must solemnly acknowledge that by its occupation of the State of Kuwait, it violated the Charter of the League of Arab States, the Joint Arab Defence Treaty and the Charter of the United Nations. The Supreme Council invites Iraq to take the necessary steps to demonstrate its good intentions towards the State of Kuwait and other States in the region in both word and deed, with a view to sparing the region the horrors of another similar catastrophe and to ensuring security and stability for all States of the region. It reaffirms its support for the United Nations Special Commission in charge of the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, and for its Executive Chairman, with the intention of enabling it to fulfil its mandate, and invites the Government of Iraq to cooperate in earnest with the Special Commission without any restrictions or conditions. It stresses the need for Iraq to carry out all relevant Security Council resolutions with a view to mitigating sanctions and alleviating the suffering of the Iraqi people, a suffering with which member States of the Supreme Council are sympathetic, thus prompting them to welcome the oil-for-food formula as a means of providing food and medical drugs to the brotherly people of Iraq. It reaffirms its firm position that the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Iraq must be preserved."

In addition to this crystal clear position of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries, the Non-Aligned Movement, at its recent summit in South Africa, underscored the need for Iraq to complete its implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions. The same call was made earlier by the leaders of the Muslim countries when they convened their summit meeting in Tehran last December.

Despite those legitimate demands and sincere calls to Iraq to respond favourably to and to put into effect the resolutions of international legitimacy, Iraq still persists in disregarding those calls and in challenging the Security Council resolutions. It claims that it has carried out what it is required to do. How can such claims be reconciled with the fact that until now we have not yet heard from Iraq any declaration or seen any initiative suggesting that it regrets what it has done? In fact, convenient selectivity is the dominant feature of Iraq's approach in addressing the resolutions and demands of international legitimacy. The most recent crisis is perhaps a good example of the Government of Iraq's procrastination and its breach of Security Council resolutions and of the Memorandum of Understanding it signed with the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Such crises, which are periodically triggered by the Iraqi Government in its attempts to disavow and circumvent its legal obligations, have all failed thanks to the solid coherence and unity of position of the members of the Security Council, which insist on full compliance by Iraq with the relevant Security Council resolutions. There is no doubt that all these crises unfortunately contribute to the prolongation of the sanctions, for which the Government of Iraq alone bears responsibility.

Accordingly, we call upon the international community to maintain its pressure on Iraq in order to force it to comply with all relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, to release all Kuwaiti prisoners and other detainees and to account for the missing persons. This is a long-standing humanitarian problem. Its continuation causes more pain and suffering for the affected families and the people of Kuwait, who remain hopeful for the return of their loved ones. It is our hope that this question will be resolved once and for all, in accordance with the traditions of Islam and the provisions of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The events of the past two decades in the Arabian Gulf region have demonstrated the need for building a regional system on the basis of full and mutual respect for the principles of sovereignty of all States, non-interference in the domestic affairs of others, non-use or threat of use of force, the right of each State to choose its own political, economic and social system, the sovereignty of each State over its natural resources and the importance of resort to peaceful negotiation for the resolution of disputes which may arise between them.

Having said that, and in view of Kuwait's belief in the inalienable rights of our sister State of the United Arab Emirates to the three islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa, we wish to reaffirm our commitment to and support for the final statement issued by the Kuwait summit of Gulf Cooperation Council member States last December.

Kuwait follows with great interest and concern the risks of the current stalemate in the Middle East peace process, which may threaten it with collapse and complete failure due to the intransigent policies of the present Israeli Government, which persists in rejecting the implementation of accords concluded with the Palestinian National Authority and disclaiming the operational principles and framework of the entire peace process, primarily Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace. This provocative policy which is pursued by Israel's Government not only undermines the peace process but also creates a general sense of despair and frustration. It also destroys all efforts to build mutual confidence between the parties concerned. It is a push towards confrontation, tension, violence and instability throughout the region.

Therefore, we demand that the Israeli Government halt its illegal policy of constructing settlements, confiscating land and demolishing houses. Israel should also cease taking unilateral measures to create faits accomplis on the ground inside the occupied territories. Instead, Israel should implement the United Nations resolutions and fulfil its pledges and accords signed with the Palestinian Authority within the framework of the peace process with a view to ensuring the attainment of all legitimate political rights of the Palestinian people, including its right to self-determination and to the establishment of its independent state on its national territory with Jerusalem as its capital.

Here, we stress the need to halt the unabating Israeli measures aimed at changing the physical features of the city of Jerusalem and transforming its legal status. We condemn the Israeli Government's decision last June to expand the municipal boundaries of the Holy City. We call upon the United Nations and the international community to fulfil their legal and political obligations in order to force Israel to comply with Security Council and General Assembly resolutions on Jerusalem and to preserve its Arab, Muslim and religious character.

In the same vein, we renew our call to the two sponsors of the peace process, especially the United States, to redouble their efforts to salvage the peace process and to bring pressure to bear on Israel to resume negotiations on the Syrian-Israeli track from the point at which they stopped, with a view to ensuring full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Arab Golan, as well as its complete and unconditional withdrawal in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978) from southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa.

Indeed, durable, just and comprehensive peace based on United Nations resolutions and the land-for-peace principle is the only guarantee for meeting the aspirations of the peoples of the region for a new era of peaceful coexistence and accelerated economic and social development.

The tragic situations that prevail in Somalia and Afghanistan as a result of civil and ethnic conflicts that brought suffering to their peoples cause us concern. Kuwait, by virtue of its historical bonds with these two countries, reiterates its appeals to all warring parties and factions there to put an end to acts of violence and senseless bloodshed. We call upon them to respond immediately to regional and international appeals and initiatives for dialogue and negotiation in order to resolve their differences and to achieve overall national reconciliation. This would allow them to channel their potentialities towards the goals of development and the reconstruction of what these conflicts have destroyed.

In condemning the killing of the Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan, Kuwait would like to extend its sincere condolences to the people and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and to the families of the victims of this tragic incident.

We appeal to both the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan to be calm, exercise self-restraint and resolve their disputes through dialogue and negotiation instead of confrontation. While we appreciate the Government of Iran's ability to handle the crisis in a way that will spare

the two Muslim peoples the dire consequences of a war whose consequences we cannot predict, Kuwait supports the endeavours of the Security Council to achieve peace in the area.

On the international plane, while we applaud the international efforts to ensure full and strict implementation of the Dayton accords to bring about peace and stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we regret the aggressive practices of the Serb forces, including the systematic uprooting and "ethnic cleansing" of the Muslim population in the province of Kosovo. We urge the international community to maintain its efforts to put an end to these inhumane practices in order to ensure the right of the native population of that province to a life of dignity and freedom.

In Africa, we are witnessing with deep regret the continuation of conflicts and civil wars in several States. These hostilities jeopardize the security and stability of many African States and strain their much needed energies and resources. Kuwait supports the efforts of the international community to bring about peace and security and to provide the means that help the African peoples and States to achieve their aspirations for economic development and to overcome the problems and difficulties that they face in various fields. We also welcome the role played by the Security Council in examining the situation in the African continent on a periodic basis. Furthermore, we commend President Nelson Mandela for the role that he assumed in this regard as Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The world economic scene is currently going through severe turbulence and turmoil that have touched off and worsened economic and social crises in many countries, especially the developing ones. The major threat to the world economy is no longer represented by inflation, but by recession, stagnation and unemployment. Therefore, we call for concerted international action to redress those difficulties, which have adverse implications for everybody. National plans and programmes capable of addressing the underlying causes of these volatile situations should be established, and help with economic aid to the affected States should be forthcoming from international monetary institutions in order to help them rectify their economic systems and restore their vitality.

In this regard, Kuwait, for its part, continued to provide economic assistance by financing many development projects in the developing countries through the Kuwait fund for development, despite the adverse impact on our economy of depressed oil prices, which plummeted this year to their lowest levels.

Adherence to the noble goals and principles of the United Nations Charter, action in accordance with its provisions and the common endeavour to promote and bolster them are essential for strengthening the United Nations capabilities for facing the challenges of the next century. This will also help us in the crystallization of a new world order in which dialogue and cooperation can prevail, and in which conflicts and hostilities would disappear. It would also encourage active participation by all in strengthening the pillars of peace and stability, in consolidating all efforts for the enrichment of human civilization and in the fulfilment of the aspirations of all peoples for peace, security, freedom and justice.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia, His Excellency Mr. Rinchinnyamyn Amarjargal.

Mr. Amarjargal (Mongolia): Allow me, Sir, to join preceding speakers in congratulating Mr. Opertti and the members of the Bureau on their well-deserved election, and to wish them every success in discharging their duties. May I also take this opportunity to express my delegation's deep appreciation to Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko of Ukraine for his outstanding stewardship of the work of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly.

One of the pressing issues that mankind is facing today is globalization and the growing interdependence of States and their effects on international relations. These objective processes will to a great extent determine the nature of international relations at the outset of the coming millennium. They open up enormous opportunities and at the same time are fraught with grave challenges. So far, the future does not seem to be bright for some, especially for the least developed, the weak and the vulnerable, which could result in an even wider gap between the rich and the poor, between nations and within them. The increasing interdependence of States and its effects are clearly demonstrated by the Asian financial crisis, which spilled over to some other parts of the world, adversely affecting the world economy, exacting high economic and social costs and raising serious concerns about the operations of financial markets.

We believe that the present financial crisis calls for the international community to create a crisis early warning system. Therefore, naturally, these issues are on the minds of peoples and on the agenda of this Assembly. We believe that the high-level meetings held last week in this Assembly will provide a good basis for serious, constructive and fruitful debate and decisions on these issues.

After decades of virtual isolation from world development, Mongolia is taking active measures to integrate itself into the global economy on the basis of whatever comparative advantage it has. Though concrete steps have been taken in the past few years, including opening up its economy to the outside world and joining the World Trade Organization, the negative consequences of globalization, which are felt especially by the weak and vulnerable, including by the landlocked developing countries, risk marginalizing it economically, if not politically. We therefore believe that the world community, when searching for adequate responses to globalization, should take into account the challenges that these vulnerable States and those in transition are facing and take measures to facilitate their adaptation to the changing realities.

We believe that the international community should pay increasing attention to the situation of landlocked developing States. They are handicapped by their geographical location and remoteness from world markets, which, as experts point out, curtails their annual growth by 1 to 3 per cent at the very least. It is no wonder that of the 30 landlocked developing countries, 16 are among the least developed, with per capita gross domestic product of less than $400. The progressive marginalization of those countries is evident from the fact that the 300 million people who live in those countries share only 0.5 per cent of world trade, with the trend moving towards further decrease.

Like other landlocked developing countries, Mongolia is taking measures to overcome the difficulties inherent to landlocked countries by closely cooperating with itstransit neighbours. In this regard, Mongolia is looking forward to concluding a subregional agreement with Russia and China that would facilitate transit transportation for all three countries and the subregion in general.

Bearing in mind the state of the world's economy and the role that the United Nations could play, Mongolia supports the efforts to increase the role of the United Nations in economic and social development, especially of weak and vulnerable States, and in creating an effective mechanism of international cooperation for development. Likewise, it is in favour of convening international conferences on development financing and on partnership for development.

Mongolia believes that the notion of development should not be limited only to economic growth. In this regard, we fully agree with the wider notion that is reflected in the human development reports.

Economic development, like other human activities, is directly connected to the state of the world's environment — in fact, with the future of mankind. In many countries, especially those that are environmentally vulnerable, the question of protecting the environment is directly linked to their security and even ultimate survival. The changes in the world climate, its caprices that we see and feel, lead us to believe that greater attention and efforts are needed to cope with this ever growing and creeping danger, the effects of which are incalculable. Therefore, we believe that the first International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction should be followed by a second decade with greater focus on reaching the targets set forth, as well as strengthening existing mechanisms and creating, where necessary, new international mechanisms.

Mongolia, following its centuries-old tradition of living in harmony with nature and the environment, declared 15 per cent of its territory — an area larger than Central Europe — a protected natural reserve. In the near future that area will comprise one third of its vast territory.

Political stability is essential for economic development and fruitful cooperation. The end of the cold war was an important milestone in international relations that raises hopes for further strengthening peace and developing cooperation among nations. However, the post-cold-war years have vividly demonstrated that peace and stability need constant efforts by States to deepen mutual trust and to settle disputes by political means. Though some political flashpoints have been eliminated and problems solved, new ones are still arising. As reflected in the general debate the situations in the Middle East, in the Balkans and in southern Africa are causing concern on the part of the international community. Mongolia supports solving those problems on the basis of negotiation, in the spirit of cooperation, without the use or threat of force. In this connection, we would like to reiterate that the Korean peninsula should be turned into a zone of peace, stability and prosperity in the interests

of the Korean people, as well as the peace and security of North-East Asia.

In another part of the Asian continent, in South Asia, the international community was shocked by nuclear tests that could exacerbate tensions and undermine the existing nuclear non-proliferation regime and the test ban. Mongolia, situated between two nuclear Powers, stands strongly against any nuclear tests and, like other countries, expressed its deep concern and regret over the recent tests. Therefore, we welcome the declaration of the People's Republic of China not to resume nuclear tests and express the hope that the latest encouraging signals from Pakistan and India will lead to strengthening the non-proliferation regime and moving closer to the objectives of nuclear disarmament. In this respect, Mongolia supports the eight-Power Declaration entitled "Towards a nuclear-weapon-free world: the need for a new agenda". Likewise, we express the hope that the negotiations on banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices will soon lead to the conclusion of a verifiable international treaty.

Mongolia believes that non-nuclear-weapon States can, in their own way, contribute to strengthening nuclear security and enhance stability. In this context, it welcomes and supports the efforts of the Central Asian States to establish a nuclear-weapon-free zone in their region. For its part, Mongolia is working to institutionalize its nuclear-weapon-free status, which would turn its territory into an area of peace, stability and predictability. All nuclear-weapon States, as well as the entire Non-Aligned Movement, fully support Mongolia's efforts to institutionalize its nuclear-weapon-free status.

Mongolia is in favour of strengthening the arms control and verification regimes set up by the Conventions on chemical and biological weapons. They will, in our view, given a genuine will to enforce them, strengthen international security. Likewise, Mongolia supports international efforts to curb the spread of conventional weapons, especially of small arms and light weapons.

International peace and security will be strengthened when and if international law is strictly observed. We believe that international law should be strengthened as the core of security relations. In this connection, Mongolia welcomes the recent adoption by the Rome Conference of the Statute of the International Criminal Court. We are in favour of a truly independent court and look forward to its early establishment and coming into operation. This would constitute an important milestone in strengthening international law and justice.

Mongolia condemns all acts of international terrorism. Therefore, it resolutely condemns the recent terrorist bombings in Kenya, Tanzania and Northern Ireland and believes that international terrorism should be fought by joint efforts and in full accordance with the norms and principles of international law. It believes that acts of terrorism should be condemned wherever, by whomever and against whomever they are carried out.

The fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is an event of special significance. It is connected with the tremendous changes that have taken place over the last half-century in the concept of human rights and the practice of ensuring them.

Thanks to the Declaration, unprecedented high standards have been set for protecting human dignity. Since the adoption of the Declaration in 1948, those standards have been strengthened and further developed by numerous international treaties and conventions and have become truly universal.

The legal foundations reflecting the world standard of protection and promotion of human rights were laid down in Mongolia's 1992 Constitution. Since then it has been further developed and concretized by relevant legislation and the establishment of the necessary administrative and legal machinery based on United Nations human rights treaties and conventions to which Mongolia has acceded. At present preparations are under way for the establishment of a national human rights commission. A draft law to that effect has been submitted to the Parliament for its consideration and adoption.

As it confronts the many global problems before it and approaches the new millennium, the world community places great hopes in the activities of a strong and well-equipped United Nations. In that connection, Mongolia firmly supports the Secretary-General's reform package.

In implementation of decisions and recommendations of United Nations summit conferences on major global social and economic problems, and in support of the so-called silent revolution, my Government has adopted a national action programme for the twenty-first century and, in close partnership with bodies of the United Nations family and non-governmental organizations

operating in Mongolia, is launching an ambitious project: the One-World Conference Series, which is aimed at ensuring an integrated follow-up to the world conferences and summits held in the early 1990s.

Reform of the United Nations cannot be complete without the reform and expansion of the Security Council. In that connection, I would like to reiterate my Government's conviction that the Council should reflect political realities, and, besides becoming more effective, its membership should be enlarged to reflect more equitable representation. It is our hope that the General Assembly debates on this important issue will soon result in concrete decisions. We believe that energetic efforts should be undertaken to make the Millennium Assembly an occasion for reforming and revitalizing the Security Council.

On the proposal of Mongolia, the General Assembly is drafting a set of guiding principles for conducting international negotiations. We believe that the development and adoption of such a set of principles would contribute to enhancing the effectiveness of negotiations as the most universal instrument for international cooperation.

My Government continues to pursue its political and economic reforms. Mongolia's commitment to the irrevocable realization of the principles of democracy, liberalism and market economy is irreversible, despite the great difficulties of the transition period. The future major policy priorities will continue to include, *inter alia*, strengthening of democratic institutions, enhancement of the basis of political stability, acceleration of privatization in the economic field, and social protection of the population, especially of its vulnerable groups.

On behalf of the Mongolian people and its Government, I take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to the international community, especially donor countries and international financial institutions, for their assistance to Mongolia since it joined the community of open societies and democratic nations.

A century that has been full of dramatic and consequential events is drawing to a close. It has been a century of great social upheaval and experimentation as well as of unprecedented social progress and technological advances. We believe that a more promising millennium is in store for all humankind and that the world community will be able to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. Mongolia stands poised at this historic juncture to make its contribution to the efforts of the United Nations to bring about a brighter and more secure future.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I call next on His Excellency Mr. Surin Pitsuwan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Thailand.

Mr. Pitsuwan (Thailand): On behalf of the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Thailand, I should like to extend my warmest congratulations to His Excellency Mr. Didier Opertti upon his unanimous election to the presidency of the current session of the General Assembly. I wish also to take this opportunity to pay tribute to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Y. Udovenko of Ukraine, for his leadership and his tireless dedication to the heavy responsibilities entrusted to him during the past year. With his wisdom and experience, he led us successfully through the fifty-second session, which took place against a backdrop of political transition and economic transformation in the world, as well as of the reform of this Organization. Allow me also to warmly welcome Ms. Louise Fréchette, who has brought creative energy to her new post of Deputy Secretary-General since the beginning of this year.

As we gather here to discuss United Nations reform and other issues of vital importance to this world body, it is imperative for us to be clear about what exactly we are trying to achieve. To my mind, many vital questions beg to be answered as the United Nations prepares to meet the challenges of a new millennium.

One question that looms large above all others is: What kind of global community do we wish to see in the next century, and what role can the United Nations play in such a community?

As Members of the United Nations, what are our shared responsibilities, both individually and collectively, in working towards a global community that fulfils the vision of our founding fathers and reflects today's changing needs? By what means can we prevent the current economic crisis from undermining the vast progress achieved during the past decade in the social, economic and political areas? In what ways can we transform the challenges emanating from the crisis into opportunities to strengthen the fabric of peace, prosperity and stability around the world? When will we achieve our common aspiration to a world in which democracy is cherished, human rights are respected, sustainable development is practised, economic freedom is exercised, and people are given the opportunity to realize their full potential?

I do not pretend to have the answers to all these questions, but I am convinced that, together, we can assist one another in addressing these crucial issues.

The United Nations should be exactly what its name implies: a community of nations united in a common vision and common purpose. For in this age of globalization, our destinies are truly intertwined and interdependent. One has to look no further than the economic crisis to realize how necessary it is for us to think and act as a global community possessed of a sense of shared responsibility.

For, indeed, the United Nations can only be what we make of it. The United Nations can only be an effective and efficient instrument for peace and prosperity to the extent that we, the Members of the United Nations, demonstrate the will, the resolve and the commitment to move the reform process forward.

I therefore wish to take this opportunity to commend the Secretary-General for having so promptly responded to the calls by the Member States to reform the managerial structure and working methods of the Secretariat and to strengthen cooperation among various United Nations agencies. Now that the Secretary-General has done what we have called upon him to do, we, the Members States, must do our part to reform the intergovernmental structure and processes of the United Nations, and we must do so expeditiously.

What is plain is that the reforms will not be of any meaningful consequence if we fail to deliver on our support, politically and financially. It certainly serves no purpose to talk about an enhanced role of the United Nations if we fail in our responsibility to provide the United Nations with the means and resources to carry out its mission. For its part, Thailand has done its best to meet its obligations despite the financial difficulties we are going through. That is the least we can do to show our steadfast support for the United Nations and the causes it represents.

But the reforms are not an end in themselves. They are the means by which we can make the United Nations relevant to the demands of the changing times. No one can predict what new challenges the twenty-first century may bring. Only one thing is certain, such challenges will be more complex, more multifaceted and more demanding than ever before. At the same time, many current issues promise to play an increasingly significant role in the international arena. These include globalization, human rights, disarmament and illicit drugs. Allow me to touch briefly on each of these issues.

The biggest and most complex challenge of our time is globalization, which has emerged as an elemental force of nature, not yet well understood but with the power to build and the power to destroy. In the early part of this decade, we saw mainly the positive side of globalization — more open markets, greater material well-being, more choice and more convenient dissemination of ideas and information. As the end of a decade draws nearer, we are also seeing that globalization is not without cost. Economies are succumbing to volatility beyond their borders. Seemingly isolated crises can send shock waves rippling through the international system.

Over the past year, Thailand and a growing number of countries have been penalized by the global financial markets. We recognize that domestic institutional shortcomings were partly to blame for the mismanagement of the economy. Reforms are therefore being undertaken in many of the affected economies, but they will likely take many years to bear fruit. At this point it seems clear that the severity of the crisis has been all out of proportion to the severity of our mistakes. The crisis is no longer an Asian crisis, but a global crisis and a systemic crisis.

The industrialized countries, insofar as they stand to gain the most from globalization and lose the most from a worldwide retreat from it, have an obligation to help contain the spreading contagion. The perception that this will stop at a certain point — at Thailand, at Indonesia, at South Korea — has time and again been proven wrong. Now, with the world teetering on the brink of global recession, the G-7, by acting to check the financial crisis, will not be performing an act of global charity but one of self-preservation.

The destabilizing potential of unfettered global financial flows, as demonstrated by the Asian crisis, points to a glaring gap in our global economic architecture. I wish to add my voice to the growing calls for the international community — developing nations in conjunction with developed nations — to come up with a mechanism or framework entrusted with the global monitoring and regulation of international financial flows. The United Nations should propose a world conference on the world financial system to be held in the very near future. The proposal by the Committee for Development Planning (CDP) of the United Nations for the creation of such a body or mechanism also merits serious consideration.

While such a mechanism is being worked out, we must pay greater attention to the human and social costs of the crisis. To cushion the impact, the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its dialogue partners will be discussing how to promote human welfare and development within the framework of the ASEAN Post-ministerial Conference caucus on social safety nets proposed by Thailand.

In this age where ideas can be carried far and wide by the currents of global media, such concepts as democracy, human rights and sustainable development have stirred the imagination of peoples in developing nations everywhere. My delegation would like to congratulate the Secretary-General for strengthening the work of the United Nations on human rights, particularly in bringing Geneva and New York together and appointing Mary Robinson as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Her grace, her experiences, her devotion and her competency will contribute to the protection and promotion of human rights worldwide.

In today's global village, human rights have become not a luxury but a necessity. Advancing the cause of human rights makes sense not only from a philosophical standpoint, but also from a pragmatic standpoint. Obstacles to and violations of human rights lead to the displacement of populations across borders, with a host of attendant social and economic problems, posing an immense burden on countries of first refuge, receiving third countries, and the international community as a whole.

The primary responsibility for observing human rights necessarily rests with the State. Respect for human rights and civil liberties must begin at home. But progress can be slow. Democratization is by definition driven by each country's own internal dynamics.

In South-East Asia the economic crisis has given momentum to the struggle for democracy and human rights. Governments are being challenged to reconcile rising public expectations and demands with pre-existing norms and institutional structures. It may well be that democracy and human rights will gain ground as a result, but there is also a lurking danger that Governments will respond harshly and reverse any progress made.

In Cambodia, for example, a fragile democracy is taking root, but the outcome is far from certain. Continuing factionalism threatens to unravel the peace and stability which took so many years to build. As a neighbour, Thailand cannot but be concerned that should this latest attempt at democracy fail, mission fatigue might set in. After spending so much time, energy and money on Cambodia, it is not unreasonable for the international community to expect some compromise among the political leadership, if only for the sake of the country's long-suffering people. It would be unfortunate indeed if the international community were to give up on Cambodia and turn its attention elsewhere. But Thailand recognizes as well as any country that building democracy is not an overnight process.

Thailand does not advocate human rights promotion merely because it is fashionable to do so. Human rights and democracy in Thailand were won the hard way — paid for with blood, sweat and tears. Something that comes at so high a price cannot but command great value.

Thailand therefore fully supports the United Nations initiative to strengthen its human rights mechanisms and believes that the global community should step up international and regional cooperation to uphold and promote fundamental human rights.

For Thailand's part, the advancement of human rights and democracy has become an integral part of our national development policy. The most recent manifestation of this effort is our new Constitution, adopted in 1997. I am proud to say that this Constitution — the most democratic in Thai history — accords human rights in Thailand their most prominent position to date and embodies practically all the important elements of the international instruments on human rights.

Thailand also gives high priority to the advancement of women and the protection of children's rights, in keeping with its obligations and commitments under the framework of the international instruments, plans and programmes of action. Moreover, as part of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, apart from the organization of a series of seminars, Thailand is making plans to accede to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Over the past decade, humanity has made great strides towards global peace, but we have yet to fully reap its dividends. Despite the end of the cold war, nations continue to place greater value on armaments than on meeting the basic needs of their people. One statistic I saw in this year's *Human Development Report* was at

once startling and disheartening. It indicated that just last year the nations of the world spent a total of $6 billion on basic education for their people, $9 billion dollars on water and sanitation, $13 billion on basic health and nutrition, and a staggering $780 billion on military expenditures.

Of the potentially most devastating threats to humanity, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction remains particularly worrisome. Thailand is fully committed to the multilateral effort towards disarmament. We welcome the establishment of the Department for Disarmament Affairs, under the leadership of Under-Secretary-General Jayantha Dhanapala, as part of the Secretary-General's reform measures approved by the General Assembly last year. We will also continue to support, financially and materially, the activities of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia and the Pacific, in spite of financial difficulties at home.

Even as we continue our efforts to dismantle and eliminate weapons of mass destruction, we must continue to work towards reducing the conditions that would prompt their use in the first place. Confidence-building through closer dialogue and interaction must be a core component of any effort to build lasting peace.

For nuclear weapons, the task of disarmament cannot be left to only the nuclear Powers. The global community must also bring pressure to bear to emphasize that nuclear arms have no place in confidence-building efforts. Thailand thus joined with nine other South-East Asian nations in signing the South-East Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, which has already come into force. We are hopeful that the nuclear-weapon States will support our endeavours in this regard by acceding to the Protocol of that Treaty.

Thailand also hopes for South-East Asia and the world to be free of anti-personnel landmines. Multilateral attempts to address the problem should not be confined merely to the banning and destruction of landmines. The international community must also tackle other equally important related issues, including the provision of financial and technical assistance on demining to mine-affected countries as well as humanitarian assistance to victims of landmines. My delegation has learned with great pleasure of the rapid process of ratification by signatory States, which would result in the Ottawa Convention entering into force less than six months from now. As a signatory State, Thailand looks forward to ratifying the Convention in the near future.

A more insidious but no less destructive threat to humanity is the scourge of narcotics. We all know the corrosive effects that drugs have on the fabric of society, the lives and dreams they shatter on a daily basis. Yet for all our efforts, the problem has never been completely eradicated.

My Government has therefore made the fight against narcotics a high national priority. On the occasion of the twentieth special session of the General Assembly in June, Thailand joined with other signatory countries of the 1993 memorandum of understanding on drug control to issue a joint Declaration reaffirming our strong determination to fight the narcotics problem. The following month, in July 1998, Thailand and its fellow ASEAN members issued a joint declaration stating our intention to achieve a drug-free ASEAN by the year 2020.

Thailand's success in opium-supply reduction is a matter of record. But effective drug control also requires demand reduction, towards which the Thai Government is also undertaking various national measures. Accordingly, we welcome the Declaration on the Guiding Principles of Drug Demand Reduction adopted at the special session earlier this year.

As food for thought, I would like to reiterate my delegation's view that, for the next decade, international drug-control efforts should focus on the problem of amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) as well as on ways and means to prevent the diversion of precursors used for illicit drug production. This idea was recently agreed upon by members of the Non-Aligned Movement at the summit in South Africa. We urge all States to cooperate in eliminating the supply of ATS and precursors, the illicit market for which is now much larger than that for drugs derived from narcotic crops, the natural sources.

As we approach the new century, it is becoming clear that we are also entering a new epoch in human history, unlike any that has gone before. As the forces of technology, globalization and complex interdependence exert ever greater influence on international relations, the coming epoch will be one of great peril but also of great promise.

The past year has shown us that our accomplishments rest on fragile foundations. The world now faces a crossroads. One path offers the choice of working harder to forge ever stronger international cooperation, spurred on by the prospect of continued

peace and prosperity. Or we can choose the other path and remain apathetic and complacent, lulled by a sense of our own infallibility.

The choice is clear enough. But the challenge will be to translate all the good intentions into effective action. Much uncertainty exists in the way international financial markets work, in the appropriate measures and strategies the international community will need to evolve in response to new economic and political challenges, and, of course, in the age-old problems of war and peace.

The United Nations, as always, will have a central role to play in resolving the differences among nations and regions, in ensuring the promotion of international codes of conduct and norms, in strengthening preventive diplomacy and peacekeeping, in bridging the gap between the rich and poor nations, in fighting the scourge of international crime, and in promoting and protecting human rights.

The United Nations alone cannot achieve these objectives. The fulfilment of our common hopes and aspirations rests not only with the United Nations Organization, but with the united nations of the world. It is up to all of us to make the right choices, to make the difference as humanity prepares to enter the new century with resolve and hope for a better world.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call on His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar.

Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani (Qatar) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I would like at the outset to extend sincere congratulations to Mr. Opertti on his election as President of this new session, the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. I wish him every success in presiding over its meetings and conducting its work.

Also, I cannot but extend heartfelt thanks to Mr. Opertti's predecessor, Mr. Hennadiy Y. Udovenko, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of friendly Ukraine, for the efforts he expended during his presidency at the fifty-second session. I wish him success in his future endeavours.

Here we come again to this universal forum, to meet, discuss and debate questions that concern our nations and peoples. This has become more necessary and pressing than ever before. The world in which we live today, and in which, God willing, future generations will live, has grown smaller in terms of geography and time, but to our great regret its problems and crises are still as great and as complicated as ever. They have even become greater and more complicated as a result of their interconnectedness and interrelated nature and the interactions among their ramifications and effects.

We cannot but wonder, while sitting here within the framework of this universal, international organization, about the events and developments that occurred in our world during the past year and about those emerging questions and crises that call for our utmost attention. Have we managed to take steps towards the better world we seek for our countries and peoples? Have we succeeded in settling any of the bloody conflicts or in pacifying any region fraught with tension and any of the chronic hotbeds of tension in the network of regional and international relations? Has democracy flourished and have human rights been consolidated? Have we dealt with the problem of terrorism and succeeded in eliminating its causes and manifestations? How far have we gone in our efforts to combat the devastating scourge of drugs? And to what extent have we achieved the aspirations to put an end to poverty, misery and unemployment; to find humanitarian solutions to the phenomenon of migration and the mass flow of refugees; to eliminate international organized crime syndicates; to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in general, and nuclear weapons in particular; to halt the arms race; and to devote more resources and energy to programmes of development, education and welfare? These are major questions concerning urgent issues and problems that call for our utmost attention and efforts in order to attain these long-awaited solutions and remedies.

During the past months, we have all followed the developments of the economic and monetary crises that have engulfed the States of South-East Asia and the Far East. We have seen how these developments have led these States to stagnation, inflation and social suffering after they had been models of prosperity and rapid growth for the world.

Also, we are still following with grave concern the economic and financial upheaval experienced by the Russian Federation, to whose new Government I would like on this occasion to wish success in its efforts to cope with this turmoil and to extricate the country from the difficulties it is facing.

Naturally, we are concerned at the prospect of the extension of the adverse consequences of these turbulent

economic conditions to other States and regions of the world that have been relatively free from them so far. This brings us to the repercussions of all of this on the economies of our States in the Gulf region and the Middle East, especially in the light of the drop in the world oil prices and the decline of the revenue earned from this vital commodity on which the producing and exporting States are primarily dependent to implement their programmes and attain their development aspirations.

If these developments prove one thing, it is the extent to which organic interdependence and interrelation have come to characterize the economies of the world, control its markets and define the constantly fluid relation between its producers and its consumers. This, in turn, prompts us to deal with these monetary and economic conditions from a global, open perspective free from isolationism and narrow-mindedness. It is also incumbent upon us to make the necessary efforts to cope with the present crisis on the basis of international partnership, social justice and developmental and monetary balance, and to prevent it from worsening and becoming, God forbid, a worldwide economic recession. If this were to happen, it would have extremely adverse political, social and economic effects with unpredictable consequences for us all.

We speak about global concerns and questions, but regional crises and conditions have not been any better during recent months. The peace to which we have aspired in our region is still, to our great regret, an elusive mirage. It is indeed very distressing, even enraging, for one to see that several years of negotiations, endeavours and mediation have failed, so far, to bring the peace process in the Middle East to its desired objective: the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace based on the principles of international legitimacy, on the resolutions of this world Organization which is hosting our current debate, and on the basis of security, stability and mutual recognition among all nations and peoples of the region.

It is also regrettable that the peace process has not experienced any positive development since the coming into office of the present Government in Israel; rather, it has suffered a serious setback. At a certain time there were hopes and expectations that the Middle East was on the verge of a genuine peace allowing everyone to live in safety and tranquillity, and to enjoy equal rights. The hope was that the wars that had set the region ablaze and had bled it for so long would come to an end, to be superseded by a process of development, cooperation and prosperity.

In the light of those hopes, a series of economic conferences related to the peace process was launched, the last of which was the Al-Doha Conference, after which these conferences came to a halt. This is indeed a reflection of the situation which the peace efforts reached and the difficulties that have faced and are still facing these efforts.

The essential problem facing the peace process, in our view, is the fact that Israel, under its current Prime Minister and its hard-line Government, has reneged, and is still reneging, on the principles which originally formed the basis for the peace process, and on the accords concluded in the framework of that process between the former Israeli Government and its Arab neighbours.

Here, I would like to remind the Israeli Government that the peace process was based on the implementation of Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), regarding the need for withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied in 1967, and resolution 425 (1978) regarding southern Lebanon and the Lebanese Bekaa. This process was also based on the principle of land for peace and the attainment by the Palestinian people of their legitimate rights. We view all of these principles as international obligations, which Israel, as a State Member of the United Nations, must honour and abide by.

In this regard, allow me to depart from the text of my statement to say how fervently I wish that Prime Minister Netanyahu had been sincere in his statement yesterday, when he claimed he was as interested in providing security and peace for Palestinian children as he was for his own children. However, the bitter reality with which we are all familiar says otherwise. Since Mr. Netanyahu took office, his Government has been pursuing a policy contrary to the objectives and the spirit of the peace process in the region. His failure to implement the accords signed with the Palestinian side has worsened the suffering of all segments of the Palestinian people, including the Palestinian children who suffer harsh living conditions where they lack the minimum basic requirements of life in education, health and nutrition. I wish Mr. Netanyahu had informed us of the future awaiting these children, who are chafing under the effect of the economic embargo imposed on them by his own Government.

In this context, I have to underline the tragic conditions of the Palestinian people under occupation and

the daily arbitrary practices they suffer at the hands of the Israeli forces, as if they had not suffered enough from 1948 until the present day. Here, I would like to single out in particular settlement activity, the confiscation of land, the demolition of houses and the driving of whole families out of their homes. All of this should strengthen our resolve to intensify efforts towards achieving a just solution that would restore to the Palestinian people their legitimate rights, including their right to establish their independent State, with holy Al-Quds as its capital, and secure the withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied Arab territories in the Syrian Golan, south Lebanon and the Lebanese Bekaa in conformity with United Nations resolutions and the principles of international legitimacy. This would make it possible to speak of genuine peace in the region on a just, comprehensive basis and on the basis of mutual respect and security for all.

I would also like to indicate that the decision by the Israeli Government on 21 June 1998 to expand the municipal limits of the city of Jerusalem, which would alter the legal status of the Holy City, is a direct contravention of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. Moreover, such a step contradicts the accords concluded between the Israelis and the Palestinians and violates the basis of the peace process which provides for deferring the question of Al-Quds so that it would be agreed upon in the permanent status negotiations. Therefore, we express our support for the presidential statement issued by the Security Council on 13 July 1998 in response to the Israeli action. The Council called upon Israel to refrain from executing its plans and from taking any action that would prejudice the outcome of such negotiations or pre-empt the accords that they may result in. The statement also calls upon Israel to comply scrupulously with its legal obligations and responsibilities under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949.

I would also like to place on record our satisfaction with the result of the voting at the 89th meeting of the General Assembly's fifty-second session, on 7 July 1998, which resulted in granting Palestine, in its capacity as observer in this international body, additional rights and privileges of participation in the sessions and work of the Assembly. We view this step as a simple rehabilitation and a modest step towards endorsing the membership of Palestine and its legitimate position in the framework of the United Nations and its institutions, in the hope that the day will come when, God willing, we will see the Palestine delegation representing a State admitted as a full-fledged, active member in this universal, international organization in the near future.

The consolidation of peace and security, the enhancement of the principles of mutual confidence and good neighbourliness, the peaceful settlement of all conflicts and disputes through dialogue and peaceful means, and commitment to the principles of international law are the foundations of the policy of my country, Qatar, vis-à-vis our neighbours. That is why we consider the question of security and peace in the Gulf region and the Middle East a vital question of the highest priority for us and for our brothers in the Gulf Cooperation Council. From this perspective, we call for the settlement of the dispute between our sister State, the United Arab Emirates, and the friendly Islamic Republic of Iran over the islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb through bilateral diplomatic efforts or, if need be, by resorting to international arbitration. This would contribute to the evolution of Gulf-Iranian relations.

On another level, the Iraqi crisis, in its turn, has been unresolved for years and there are no signs on the horizon of an impending, appropriate solution to it. With the persistence of this situation in Baghdad, which could erupt at any moment, and with all its potential for destabilizing the entire region, the condition of the Iraqi people has reached tragic proportions under the effect of the international sanctions that have been imposed upon the country for years. Whether or not we are convinced of the usefulness of these sanctions in achieving their envisaged objectives, and while we fully assert the need to implement all relevant Security Council resolutions, we would also express the hope that the embargo imposed on the Iraqi people will be lifted in order to mitigate the harsh suffering it has caused and the adverse effects it has had on these people.

We view with concern the tense situation in the neighbouring region of the Horn of Africa, where States and people have suffered numerous tragedies and hardships as a result of border and civil conflicts and wars. These have resulted in the squandering of resources and potentials and aggravated the phenomena of poverty, starvation and migration.

I would like to single out the Republic of the Sudan, the suffering of whose people, we hope, will end in a manner that preserves its territorial integrity and the unity of its people. We also hope that all differences among the States of the region will be settled by peaceful means and on the basis of international legitimacy, so as to ensure

cooperation and good-neighbourliness among all States and peoples.

Furthermore, we in the State of Qatar feel that the lifting of the embargo and sanctions imposed on the sister Libyan Jamahiriya is a basic and popular demand, especially in the wake of recent positive developments in this matter. In this regard, we would express our hope and confidence that the efforts currently under way will result in a judicial and diplomatic formula satisfactory to all parties to this question and put a definitive end to its repercussions. This would ensure the lifting of the embargo and the sanctions imposed on Libya and close the file on the Lockerbie question, while doing justice to all parties concerned.

In the same vein, and proceeding from the strong attachment of the State of Qatar to the principle of the peaceful settlement of disputes and from its profound belief in the necessity of consolidating security and stability and avoiding the dangers of war, hostilities and clashes of any kind, I wish to express our great concern over the regrettable events unfolding in Afghanistan and the escalation of tension along its borders with Iran. While stressing our conviction that the best means to solve the Afghan crisis in its various aspects lie in the diplomatic good offices which are proceeding under the supervision and auspices of the United Nations, we appeal to the parties concerned to desist from any action to further escalate the conflict or widen its scope.

Moreover, I cannot but touch upon the tragedy of the people of the Kosovo region, which is now suffering the same civil conflicts, "ethnic cleansing" and mass migration that have plagued other peoples of the former Yugoslavia. While thanking the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his tireless efforts and initiatives to defuse tensions and settle conflicts throughout the world, we call upon him once again to continue and redouble his efforts to end these conflicts and prevent their expansion and escalation, especially in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq and Africa.

The crises and conflicts I have cited are but examples of the magnitude of the challenges and tasks which we must face. There are many thorny questions and complicated problems to which all of us, the inhabitants of this planet, regardless of our different races and beliefs, must work together to seek solutions, for the sake of our future and that of our children and grandchildren.

Foremost and most serious among these is the question of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including chemical, biological and, especially, nuclear weapons. A few months ago, we, like the entire world, were shocked by the disturbing developments arising from the exchange of nuclear-weapons tests by India and Pakistan and by their inherent threat of unleashing a conventional and nuclear arms race between those two large neighbours. Here, I would like to recall the position of my country on such tests: We call for the exercise of wisdom and the prompt signing by all States, without exception, of the treaties banning nuclear tests and limiting the proliferation of these weapons of mass destruction, while earnestly seeking to reduce the number of such weapons in the world in preparation for their complete elimination. This is specifically what we would like to see in our region, which, I emphasize, we would wish entirely free of weapons of mass destruction, especially nuclear weapons.

In this regard, I would point out that Israel is the only nuclear-weapon State in the region and the only State that has so far refused to sign the treaties relevant to the prohibition of such weapons and the prevention of their proliferation. If it persists, this situation will lead to tension and the repercussions arising from the imbalance of power it causes. Therefore, in our view, it is necessary and imperative to take concrete steps to eliminate these weapons from the region, so as to avoid the risks of launching an arms race that would further destabilize the region.

The State of Qatar also signed the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, which was concluded in Oslo. We signed it officially in Ottawa last December, prompted by our belief in the correctness of banning these mines and our awareness of the many humanitarian tragedies resulting from their use, especially among innocent civilians in the wake of the wars during which they had originally been laid.

Other worldwide scourges, which we have long seen proliferate and expand, are no less serious than weapons of mass destruction in terms of their devastating and comprehensive effects on the peoples and States of the world. Drugs, organized crime, famine and the disruption of environmental and climatic conditions have all become global threats. We sincerely believe that it is impossible to tackle these threats except through comprehensive international endeavours and programmes.

In this regard, I would like, on behalf of my Government, to thank and congratulate the friendly Government of Italy and the delegations of the world that participated in the United Nations Diplomatic Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Establishment of an International Criminal Court, which was held in Rome last June and July. It culminated in a declaration on the establishment of this Court, the jurisdiction of which will include trying those responsible for acts of genocide and war criminals.

I would also like to refer to the twentieth special session of the General Assembly devoted to countering the world drug problem, held in this Hall early last June. It showed us the magnitude of this intractable problem and its serious effects on all people of the world without exception. My Government would like to thank the friendly Government of Mexico for taking the initiative of proposing to the General Assembly the convening of the special session in order to draw up a comprehensive international strategy, under the auspices of the United Nations, to cope with this problem, which threatens everybody.

The need to protect and conserve the environment has become a pressing question that requires all of us, as peoples inhabiting this planet, to devote greater efforts and resources to addressing it in a framework of coordination and cooperation on a comprehensive international level and in the context of the assumption by each of us of his own responsibilities and duties. There is no doubt that the environment today has been severely damaged by the faulty policies and practices still pursued by some industrial States and institutions. This damage is also a result of mankind's age-old neglect of and indifference to its surroundings. However, the time has now come to undertake a coordinated and serious universal effort to put an end to these abuses and practices, which clearly threaten the future of the globe and all its peoples and regions with a potential calamity.

The right of man to live in dignity and freedom remains. For the Government and the people of Qatar it is a sacred divine right, which we must all respect and protect. Unfortunately, we cannot confirm that human rights and man's freedom to live in dignity and security are protected and available everywhere in today's world. There are still numerous disturbing exceptions and violations in many regions and States of the world. Fortunately, however, we are witnessing significant progress towards substantial recognition of these legitimate human rights, of greater political, social and cultural democracy and of humanitarian and civilizational openness.

It is our sincere hope and desire that that progress will be consolidated and strengthened throughout the world. In Qatar, we are especially proud that, under the auspices of His Highness the Prince Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani and under his instructions, vital pioneering steps are being taken to achieve more democracy and to consolidate participation by all segments of the population through the exercise of responsibility and freedom of choice, the guarantee of social and civil rights and civic duty, and respect for freedom of opinion, of speech and of the press within the framework of the laws and the ideals and values in which we believe and which we cherish.

As we stand today at the threshold of a new century with its attendant rapid and continuous changes, transformations and surprises and face the growing number of tasks and the greater challenges they impose, we are firmly convinced of the need for readiness and preparedness to meet these challenges, undertake the tasks assigned to us and shoulder our responsibilities in a spirit of cooperation, coordination, friendship, mutual respect and commonality of interest for the benefit of our countries and peoples.

Proceeding from our deep faith in God Almighty, this is the least we can do for ourselves, our countries and our peoples and for our one world. Our responsibility to the future generations dictates that we must provide for them a better world, a better life and a better future. May God guide us.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Arabic*): I now call upon the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Principality of Liechtenstein, Her Excellency Ms. Andrea Willi.

Mr. Ortega Urbina (Nicaragua), Vice President, took the Chair.

Ms. Willi (Liechtenstein): I wish to welcome at the outset the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. He has assumed a difficult and important task, and we have full confidence in his ability to give this body the direction required at a time when many complex issues are on its agenda.

I would like to pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who has continued to represent our Organization in an outstanding manner and to whom we are all indebted for initiating a comprehensive reform process. His presentation of the report on the work of the

Organization at the beginning of the general debate has provided us with a clear picture of where the United Nations stands today and of the major issues we must address.

We remain committed to the reform process and hope that the ongoing changes will bring about the urgently needed improvement in the financial situation of the Organization. We share the Secretary-General's deep concern at the deterioration of the security situation of United Nations personnel involved in field operations and the view that determined action by the General Assembly is needed to address this problem, which poses a threat to many core activities of the United Nations. On the positive side, we share the satisfaction felt at the entry into force of the Convention on the Prohibition of Anti-personnel Mines next spring and are pleased to announce that Liechtenstein will deposit its own instrument of ratification very soon.

After a series of major conferences in the first half of this decade, we now have to tackle the important task of addressing the follow-up processes to these major events, in order to ensure that the relevant final documents are implemented on the national and international levels and thus translated into concrete action for the benefit of people worldwide.

This year, we celebrate both the adoption of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action five years ago and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, which is usually referred to as the "50 plus 5" anniversary. We hope this event will send a powerful message to the world that the United Nations and its Member States are aware of the need for genuine and effective national policies and international cooperation in order to achieve the standards established in this area by the United Nations.

The Universal Declaration constitutes a milestone in the history of human rights activities of the United Nations and the basis for the remarkable achievements made over the following years and decades. Therefore, it is our view that on 10 December we should reaffirm in strong and clear terms the contents of this Declaration, as well as our commitment to fully implement its provisions, in order to ensure that all individuals worldwide benefit from the standards set out in the Declaration.

The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action have been a key element in the human rights deliberations for half a decade now. The value and importance of this document have become very clear during this period of time, while the implementation of many of its contents has been slow and not satisfactory. The Vienna document is complementary to the previously existing instruments and standards in the field of human rights.

Our main task is to ensure that these high-quality standards under international law are made a reality in daily life for people worldwide, since there continues to be a very noticeable deep gap between these standards and their implementation in practice. I am pleased to announce that the Liechtenstein parliament has approved accession to the International Covenants on Human Rights, as well as to the protocols to the second Covenant.

We fully subscribe to the principle that all human rights are interdependent and mutually reinforcing and have thus to be treated on the same footing. There is, however, one area to which we would like to give particular emphasis, namely, the promotion and protection of the rights of children, which warrant our special attention. The scope and number of violations of the rights of the child are particularly disturbing, and we are grateful to note that the international community has in the recent past stepped up its efforts to combat some of the most outrageous forms of such violations. Another welcome and necessary measure is the appointment of a Special Representative of the Secretary-General on children in armed conflicts. We pledge our full support to the activities undertaken by Mr. Olara Otunnu and express our hope that his office will be provided with the necessary human and financial resources to fulfil its far-reaching and complex tasks. We are disappointed that it has not yet been possible to adopt an optional protocol on children in armed conflicts, which could make a major contribution in this respect.

A very important and timely impetus to the cause of human rights and international humanitarian law was provided by the adoption of the Statute of an International Criminal Court this summer in Rome. While the International Criminal Court is not a human rights court, we consider the Rome Statute to be a very important contribution to Human Rights Year. We welcome the outcome of the Rome Conference as an achievement of truly historic dimensions and — like the Ottawa process — as an example of the fruitful role civil society can play in an intergovernmental negotiating process of high complexity. While we would have preferred to give the International Criminal Court more far-reaching competence, we are very satisfied and encouraged to note that what seemed like a dream just a few years ago now

has a chance to become a reality. It is of crucial importance to realize that the adoption of the statute was not the end of the process, but, rather, a decisive step which requires determined follow-up and further hard work from all of us. Constructive and serious work in the Preparatory Commission and a speedy process of signature and ratification are the most important tasks for the imminent future, and we hope that the General Assembly will send out a strong message to this end. As a participant in the Rome Conference and as one of the first signatories of the Statute, Liechtenstein stands ready to make its contribution.

One of the most disturbing developments in the past year took place in the field of nuclear non-proliferation. Liechtenstein continues to condemn all nuclear tests and has expressed its concern at the impact of the tests conducted this year on political stability in the region concerned. This matter touches on the very existence of humankind, and thus we have to make every effort to create a non-proliferation regime which is just, effective and credible. The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) of 1968 and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty of 1996 constitute, if fully implemented, two cornerstones of such a regime. Other measures will be necessary, and it is of crucial significance that all countries stand ready to make their contribution to solving this issue in the interest of all of us.

Our own region has been affected by the crisis in the former Yugoslavia for many years now. We all welcomed the conclusion of the Dayton Agreements, because they brought an end to the terrible suffering of the people in the former Yugoslavia. We remain concerned, however, at the slow process of implementation, especially with regard to the civilian aspects of the Agreements.

The year 1998 has brought about a new crisis of alarming dimensions: the conflict in Kosovo. Liechtenstein condemns the numerous and serious violations of international humanitarian law in this conflict and remains very concerned about the situation of the civilian population and the potential impact of the developments in Kosovo on regional stability. Preventing a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation and finding a viable political solution are the two most important issues for a solution to the Kosovo crisis, which poses a clear threat to international peace and security and should therefore be dealt with appropriately by the United Nations. It has become clear once again that the capacity of our Organization to deal with such challenges needs to be enhanced and improved. As with other crises in the recent past, most notably the one in Rwanda, the outbreak of violence in Kosovo came as a surprise to nobody, and yet not enough was done to prevent it.

Further developing the concept of prevention and translating it into concrete action remains, therefore, in our view, one of the most important issues on the agenda of the United Nations, and the increased involvement of women in preventive diplomacy continues to be of particular importance to us. We note with gratitude the signs of an increased political will to support the concept of prevention, while we believe that more concerted and determined efforts to this end have to be made. We are ready to make our contribution, and I would like to recall in this context once again our initiative on the right of self-determination. We are more convinced than ever that a more innovative and flexible application and implementation of this right has great potential to defuse tensions and prevent conflicts within States — the type of conflicts with which the international community is most commonly faced these days. A genuine political dialogue between central Governments and communities living within States lies at the heart of our ideas, the ultimate goal of which is the prevention of tendencies by such communities to claim statehood and attempt to achieve this goal through violent means. The Liechtenstein Research Programme on Self-determination, conducted at Princeton University, has continued and increased its activities over the past year, and we have noted with great satisfaction and gratitude the interest and contributions from a large number of permanent missions in New York. We will continue to try and enhance political support for our ideas, which we hope can make a contribution to the effectiveness of our Organization in the future.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Halldór Ásgrímsson, Minister for Foreign Affairs and External Trade of Iceland.

Mr. Ásgrímsson (Iceland): Allow me at the outset to congratulate Mr. Opertti upon his election to his prestigious position. I am convinced that he will guide us wisely through the fifty-third session of the General Assembly.

The world community is now confronted with several dangerous situations which threaten the existence of millions of people, situations which demand immediate action by our Organization. I would like to draw special attention to the plight of the people of Kosovo and the

alarming situation in several countries in Africa, where wars have caused appalling suffering and directly threaten the development and advancement of the whole continent.

Our Organization is also confronted with issues of a universal nature which can determine the future of humankind, such as the protection of the environment and the delicate balance between economic growth and the conservation of natural resources. In this respect, the protection of the oceans and the marine ecosystem is one of the most important tasks facing us today.

The fact that this is the International Year of the Ocean allows me to draw the Assembly's attention to the fact that the oceans are the single largest source of protein and a crucial part of Earth's ecosystem. We have to come to grips with the reality that the ocean's bounty is finite and that the ocean is not a bottomless receptacle of human waste and pollution.

Pollution of the seas from land-based sources remains a daunting problem. However, effective implementation of the Washington Global Programme of Action will certainly bring about much improvement in this respect. Pollution by persistent organic pollutants is another major concern. Prompt completion by the year 2000 of a legally binding instrument dealing with some of these pollutants will be an important step towards reducing and eventually eliminating this kind of pollution.

Accidents in which radioactive material from nuclear waste treatment plants has spilled into the sea have demonstrated clearly the dangers of such facilities. Under no circumstances should such plants be allowed to operate near the ocean. It is my hope that our generation will take the necessary measures so that future generations inherit clean oceans free from contamination.

Nations with similar interests must strive for agreements on sharing and sensibly managing common stocks and fisheries on the high seas. We must ensure that the harvesting of living marine resources can continue and that economic development and conservation go hand in hand. In order to ensure a vibrant and profitable fisheries sector, States need to introduce the principles of private enterprise into the fishing industry and make its products compete on the free market. In Iceland we have devised a market-driven fisheries management system which encompasses both conservation of our resources and their sustainable use.

The fishing stocks in the exclusive economic zone around Iceland have been steadily growing since a system of individual transferable fishing quotas was implemented in order both to achieve desired economic objectives and to protect our resources. However, fisheries in many parts of the world are overexploited. In my view, this is mainly due to the fisheries sector's being inundated with government subsidies, resulting in excess fishing capacity and the distortion of market principles. No other single action could bring about such positive results, in a short time, towards achieving sustainable development in fisheries as the elimination of government subsidies.

I would like to note that when we read United Nations publications dealing with the state of the world's fisheries we are continually confronted with the expression "overfishing", not "fishing". This implies, first, that fisheries everywhere are utilized to the hilt, and, secondly, that States in general have failed in the management of the resources inside their economic zones. This gives a wrong picture of the situation.

I wish to draw the Assembly's attention to an interesting study issued a few weeks ago by the World Wildlife Fund on the root causes of the depletion of fish resources in many parts of the world. The study states that overcapacity in fishing fleets is a key factor and that Government subsidies of this industry is another. It rightly points out that one solution to this problem would be to issue each fishing vessel tradeable rights to a percentage of the catch. It goes on to say that this system has worked well in New Zealand, Australia and Iceland.

In the negotiations on the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change we stressed that the further harnessing of Iceland's abundant, clean and renewable energy sources could contribute towards the global effort to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Iceland has for decades placed special emphasis on the utilization of clean and renewable energy sources, such as geothermal energy and hydropower. Of its own accord, and through extensive investment, Iceland has replaced fossil fuels for space heating and electricity generation with clean and renewable energy sources. Those efforts, made prior to 1990, have severely limited the possibilities for Iceland to further reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.

In our view, it must be recognized that the economy of some countries is dependent on few natural resources. They therefore have fewer options to secure their economic base by comparison with countries with diverse

economies. It is both illogical and unfair to deny countries the right to harness and utilize clean and renewable energy. Such a result would run counter to the objective of the Convention and be incompatible with Agenda 21.

This year's substantive session of the Economic and Social Council demonstrated clearly that the industrialized countries must make a concentrated effort to remove barriers to trade and integrate the developing countries into global markets. Many developing countries now have flourishing private sectors, competing in world markets.

Last month I had the pleasure of visiting some countries in the southern part of Africa, of observing the enormous human and natural wealth of these countries and of learning first hand about the possibilities available to the people there. It is clear that peace has brought prosperity to those countries. My country is engaged in development cooperation in that area, focusing on human capacity-building as well as training and education in the field of fisheries. It should be stressed that, parallel to the privatization of the economy, there must be increased funding for building up social services, health care and education. It is my firm intention that Iceland shall increase its official development assistance to our partner countries in Africa. This fall, I had the pleasure of welcoming the first students, coming from three African countries, of the new United Nations University Fisheries Training Programme in Iceland. We hope that in the future students from all parts of the world will come for training in all aspects of the fishing industry.

I would especially like to draw attention to the importance of strengthening the position and role of women in society, mainly with regard to their education and active participation in the economy. In this respect, we have to tackle the problem of overpopulation with comprehensive solutions.

The volatility in the world's financial markets has led to severe recession in many countries and slowed economic growth in others. Globalization is a part of the development of the world today, and for all countries it entails both risks and benefits. The risks must be borne by all, and the benefits must be spread evenly and widely, especially to the poorest.

Our Organization has seldom had more urgent tasks than preserving peace, security and human rights. I would like to express great concern over the nuclear tests recently conducted by two countries in South Asia, and I welcome recent statements by those States that they will adhere to the provisions of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

War has visited many countries since we gathered here last year. Keeping peace requires our constant vigilance. In several African countries war and ethnic tension have brought death and destruction. The cruel fate of children in war is more evident now than ever before. Once again the people of the former Yugoslavia are confronted with a problem of tragic proportions. In Kosovo thousands of refugees are facing hunger and a cold winter.

Conflicts where the civilian population is targeted are abhorrent and leave scars that take a long time to heal. We now recognize that preserving peace demands more intensive measures than before, such as the strengthening of democratic institutions, policing, overseeing elections, establishing judiciary systems and monitoring human rights.

In many countries it is as though the Middle Ages had never ended and the darkness of intolerance, cruelty and human rights abuses descends on people's lives every day. The fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights should encourage us to be stalwart in our principles. Human rights are universal, and the veil of religion and tradition cannot and will not be accepted as an excuse for tolerating flagrant human rights violations.

The international community must deal successfully with problems such as terrorism and war crimes. The world community has had to look on in horror as terrorists have, in cowardly fashion, targeted innocent people going about their everyday lives. We urge States to sign and ratify the counter-terrorism conventions. The adoption of the Statute of the International Criminal Court this summer in Rome shows the firm commitment of the international community to let law take precedence over lawlessness and justice over injustice. Once the court is firmly in place it is our hope that criminals who commit atrocious acts, such as crimes against humanity, genocide and war crimes, will have no escape from the long reach of international law. We urge all States to sign and ratify the Statute.

We look forward to the effective implementation of the agreed outcome of the General Assembly's special session on drugs. Enhancing judicial cooperation and law enforcement cooperation is essential, as well as bearing down on money-laundering worldwide. The elimination

of illicit crops should be a high priority in the global drug control strategy.

We strongly support the Norwegian and Canadian initiative to control the proliferation of small arms and light weapons. The huge number of these weapons should be of great concern to the international community.

Our Organization must enter the next millennium as an effective and reformed Organization, with lean management, result-based budget, increased action potential in the most vital fields, strengthened finances and a clear commitment from all Member countries to pay their contributions without conditions.

Finally, Iceland is committed to the ideals of the United Nations. We have always been ready to shoulder our responsibilities in every aspect of the Organization's work because we believe that all Member countries should make their mark on events shaping the world we live in today.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to 5 minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Burleigh (United States of America): The commitment of the United States to a truly democratic Cuba is deep and abiding. The attack by the Foreign Minister of Cuba against the United States yesterday in this Hall reflects the Cuban Government's fear of peaceful democratic transition and its fear of respect for human rights. The Foreign Minister's remarks clearly demonstrate why our differences are with the Cuban Government, not with the Cuban people.

I ask the Assembly two questions. When will the Cuban Government allow the Cuban people to determine their own future through free and fair elections? When will Cuba free political prisoners languishing in jails because they want nothing more than to see a stable democratic Cuba?

Secretary of State Albright expressed the United States view in February in an address to the Cuban people. She said that the United States promotes democracy, freedom and respect for human rights around the world. We do so not because we wish to impose our values or way of life. Precisely the opposite is true. We want the people of every nation to be able to determine for themselves who their leaders should be, how their laws should be made and how their lives should be led. That is not an imposition. Dictatorship is an imposition. Democracy is a choice.

It is tragically ironic for a representative of the Cuban Government to cite the Universal Declaration of Human Rights while political prisoners, such as the courageous leaders of the dissident group whose only "crime" is to peacefully express dissent, are kept captive in Cuban prisons under inhumane conditions. Such policies have inflicted deep suffering on the Cuban people.

In contrast, despite the misguided policies of the Cuban Government which have impoverished its own citizens, tens of thousands of American citizens have demonstrated their generosity over the years by sending millions and millions of dollars in assistance to needy family members in Cuba. The reality is that dozens of sales of medicines and medical equipment to Cuba have been approved. The reality is that there have been thousands of visits by Cubans to this country and by Americans to Cuba. The reality is that there are extensive and growing contacts between non-governmental groups in this country and independent groups in Cuba.

It is time for the Cuban Government to join the modern community of democracies in the western hemisphere so that the Cuban people can enjoy the stability, freedom and prosperity they so richly deserve. It is time for the Cuban Government to heed the words of the famous Cuban poet, José Martí, who wrote in his magazine, *The Golden Age*, for the youth of Cuba, "Freedom is the right that every man has to be honourable and to think and to talk without hypocrisy."

Mr. Kim Chang Guk (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): The South Korean chieftain in authority has been loudly advertising his "sunshine policy" of dialogue, reconciliation and exchange with the North, as if he were about to bring great changes to North-South relations since he took power in February this year. However, we are deeply disappointed with the present South Korean authorities' behaviour during the

past several months, and we cannot but doubt whether they can positively contribute to North-South relations. The South Korean authorities have declared their compatriots of the North their sworn enemy, and, together with the United States and Japan, are trying their utmost to isolate and stifle the North.

We can cite instances attributable to the South Korean authorities. In June, the South Korean authorities forced the crew members of our wrecked submarine to commit suicide instead of rescuing them. The South Korean authorities, who have no voice in the matter of the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula, continuously attempt to slander us in connection with the nuclear issue. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the United States are implementing the Framework Agreement.

It is really ridiculous and preposterous that South Koreans should attempt to teach us how to behave with regard to the implementation of the Framework Agreement. If South Korea wants the nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula to be settled fairly, South Korea should give up the United States nuclear umbrella and demand the withdrawal of the United States army from South Korean territory. Without this, whatever good words South Korea may say, they are all lies. There is no reason in the argument of South Koreans that we have not acceded to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. Joining international treaties is a matter within the sovereignty of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. It would be better for the South Koreans to keep their mouths shut, as they, together with the United States, extensively used chemical weapons during the Korean War; they still maintain chemical weapons on military bases.

Even at this moment, the South Korean authorities are conspiring, together with the United States and Japan, to deal with our satellite launch. Our satellite launch was a grand national event to be recorded in the history of our nation, an event which demonstrated the spirit and talent of the Korean nation. We have done this with our own technology and resources; it is a demonstration of the might of our independent national economy. I should like to ask the South Korean authorities how many countries and nations in the world have the capability to launch a satellite. Is it not a grand event to be celebrated by the whole nation? However, the South Koreans, in collusion with the United States and Japan, are attempting to put pressure on the North, branding our satellite launch a "threat to security". These acts on the part of the South Koreans only show that they are traitors to the nation and running dogs of foreign forces.

The tireless efforts of the North to realize the grand conception of the great leader, Comrade Kim Jong-Il, to build our nation into a prosperous country, are acts of patriotism, and the South Koreans' attempts to isolate and stifle the North, with the help of foreign forces, are acts of country-selling. The South Korean authorities declare that their "sunshine policy" is intended to induce the North to reform and open up; this is aimed at eroding the ideology and social system of the North and to bring it to final collapse. If the South Korean authorities really want national reconciliation and reunification, they should show a national conscience and sincerity instead of attempting to mislead the world public with their "sunshine policy".

First of all, the South Korean authorities should abandon the policy of dependence on foreign forces and should employ a reconciliation policy of alliance with the North. The South Korean authorities should reaffirm their commitment to the three principles of independence, peace and great national unity enshrined in the North-South Joint Declaration of 4 July 1972. As the proverb says, blood is thicker than water.

The South Korean authorities should try to solve the current economic crisis with the joint efforts of the nation instead of relying on foreign capital. Now, the South Korean authorities are selling land, factories and other forms of real estate to foreign capital; we are afraid that they are selling the whole country and that nothing will be left for the South Korean people.

Our space technology is a national asset of the whole Korean nation. South Korea may launch a satellite on our rockets at half price, or free, instead of going to other countries which demand high prices.

Secondly, South Korea should take practical measures to improve North-South relations, without resorting to lip-service. The South Korean authorities, above all, should abolish the national security law and dismantle the National Security Planning Agency. We cannot think of dialogue and reconciliation without the abolition of a legal and institutional system which defines the North as an enemy and which outlaws any contact with the North as an act of "benefiting the enemy". That is an act of deceiving the nation and the world.

Mr. Al-Hitti (Iraq) (*interpretation from Arabic*): I have asked to speak in exercise of the right of reply to respond to statements made here this afternoon by His Excellency the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kuwait. The Foreign Minister of Kuwait spoke of many issues relating to Iraq. Unfortunately, he spoke of them either in a partial way or in a way that did not conform to the facts. Let me mention just two of the issues he raised.

First, Iraq has implemented all the commitments imposed upon it by the Security Council. I must refer to the questions posed by the Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq at his meeting, on 3 August 1998, with Mr. Richard Butler, Executive Chairman of the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM), about whether he had any evidence that Iraq was not completely free of all prohibited weapons, whether Iraq had any installations or equipment relating to weapons that had not yet been destroyed, and whether UNSCOM had noted any new serious breach by Iraq relating to resuming the manufacture of such weapons. Naturally, Mr. Butler was unable to reply to all those questions because he does not have the courage to tell the truth for reasons and pressures that we are all aware of.

Secondly, our Kuwaiti brothers have on many occasions talked of so-called Kuwaiti prisoners or hostages in Iraq, although they know full well that Iraq has no prisoners and no hostages. Furthermore, this question is being followed up professionally within the Tripartite Committee under the supervision of the International Red Cross. Indeed, Kuwait does not even bother to respond to Iraqi questions about its prisoners and detainees in Kuwait, whose fate remains to date unknown.

The Kuwaiti Government's insistence on raising this issue has but one explanation. That explanation is that Kuwait persists in its inimical position towards Iraq aimed at turning the international community against my country in order to prolong the embargo imposed on the Iraqi people and thereby increase its suffering. The continuation of such a regrettable pattern by the Kuwaiti Government makes it incumbent upon us to remind it that if it truly seeks security and stability it must first put aside the policy of conspiring against Iraq. That very policy is what led Kuwait to its current predicament.

The Kuwaiti Government must examine and understand the facts of history and geography. It must learn the lessons of the past through positive interaction with its Arab environment and recognize its undeniable changes. However, if it insists on importing and purchasing its security artificially from outside, according to what was said by the Kuwaiti Defence Minister some days ago, we sincerely believe that this road will not lead to any positive result. It will merely lead to wasting the resources of the brotherly Kuwaiti people because the foreign warships and marine forces that Kuwait currently hides behind are concerned only with looting the wealth of the region. Furthermore, the foreign Powers sending such forces are in fact only concerned with their own expedient and selfish interests. History is replete with lessons in that regard.

I must also mention what the famous Arab writer Mohammed Hassanain Haykal said on this very situation:

> "Geography has fixed landmarks. Warships always move away."

Finally, I should like to express Iraq's full readiness to resolve all pending issues with our brothers in Kuwait or elsewhere through negotiation in a manner that preserves the interests and dignity of all parties. Ultimately, we are all in the same boat. There is no substitute for dialogue and brotherly understanding. We must look to the future with optimism. We must learn from the lessons of the past. We must move forward. If we remain prisoners to the events of the past, we shall waste our present and the future of our children. History will not judge lightly those responsible for this painful event that our nation is going through.

Mr. Robaina González (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): We do not need to wait 24 hours to respond; we have had these arguments for over 40 years.

What we have witnessed is the height of the purest cynicism. The fact that the United States asked for the floor to respond to Cuba's arguments does not surprise us; we were expecting that. It does not surprise us because that country persists in carrying out all manner of economic and political aggression, as was denounced yesterday by Cuba and as has been repeatedly rejected by the international community. We expected this because the arrogance and overbearing nature of the United States know no bounds. It has always had an excess of overbearingness; but what it has always lacked is imagination and, above all, modesty.

So much rhetoric bores us and tires us. Cuba has so much democracy that the Cuban people is prepared to defend it with its blood if necessary. Enough hypocrisy. The only truly humanitarian thing is the unconditional lifting of the blockade.

Let me clarify something for the delegation of the United States: the humanitarian aid that has reached Cuba from that country has been delivered not thanks to the Government of the United States, but rather in spite of the obstacles, limitations and restrictions it has always imposed. There has been no change in its policy of denying export licences to American companies and non-governmental organizations working through humanitarian channels to deliver food and medicines — including those used to treat heart disease and cancer and to give emergency treatment.

That country, whose Governments have been responsible for four decades of dirty economic war and hostility against Cuba, is trying to extinguish an entire people through hunger and disease. It has been flagrantly, massively and systematically violating the human rights of an entire people. It has intensified its aggressive actions. It is the country historically responsible for the many different mercenary and terrorist actions against my country. It is the country from whose territory terrorist acts have been recently organized against Cuba with impunity. It is the country where those responsible for the hijacking of passenger aircraft in flight go unpunished.

The country that is the home of soft money and the commercialization of policy, where laws are bought and sold and where consumerism is more important than decency, should not come to give us lessons of freedom and morality. One has to be extremely cynical to accuse others and at the same time to arrogate to one's self the right to attack, to use force, to sow panic among entire peoples, to conspire to destabilize sovereign States and to condemn terrorism when it affects oneself and to practise it selectively against others. The Olympic champion of double-standard morality should not speak about morality.

What Cuba is asking is that the words spoken by the United States this afternoon be inscribed precisely in the record as an example of the type of conduct that must not be carried into the next millennium.

The country we have patiently heard express its famous concerns about Cuba is the country that has 42 million people without medical insurance, half of them children. It is the country where tuberculosis associated with poverty is growing by 20 per cent per year. It is the country where police brutality is growing on a daily basis. It is the country where over 100 people have died from being exposed to pepper spray. It is the country where prisoners are beaten every day and trained dogs are used as instruments of torture. In some of its jails about half the prisoners suffer from AIDS. That country is also home to political prisoners from Puerto Rico. It is the country where the incarceration rate of African-Americans is about 60 per cent higher than for whites. It is the country where infant mortality in the black population is twice that of whites. It is the country where there are more young black people in jail than in universities. It is the country where the homeless population has doubled. It is the country where children who are the products of a culture of violence have the highest murder and suicide rate on the planet. It is the country where a black child on a bicycle was shot 13 times for carrying a toy gun and was then described as an armed black person.

Our own José Martí told us, "Everything I have ever done, and everything I will ever do ... will be done to keep ... the United States from pouncing on the countries of the Americas."

Mr. Al-Otaibi (Kuwait) (*interpretation from Arabic*): We regret that the representative of Iraq asked to exercise his right of reply with regard to the facts in the statement of our First Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah. He made some uncourteous remarks to which I will not respond. We regret to have to listen once again to the allegations that Iraqi officials reiterate on every occasion that Kuwait is politically exploiting the question of prisoners in order to prolong the sanctions against Iraq.

Of course, we have listened often to these allegations, but the facts show the following, which we briefly present. First, the International Committee of the Red Cross, which presides over the work of the Tripartite Commission, which is charged with following up the question of the missing and those held captive, has not reached any conclusions because of Iraq's stalling and its lack of cooperation in uncovering the fate of more than 600 prisoners and missing persons. Secondly, Iraq provided information about more than 126 prisoners after having denied knowing anything about them. Iraq had claimed that it knew nothing about them. But we cannot rely on what they say in view of our bitter experience with the policies of the Iraqi regime. Iraq long claimed that it had no Iranian prisoners, then suddenly surprised the world by releasing some of them last year.

The Iraqi representative claims that Kuwait wants to maintain the embargo on Iraq. This is false. First, Kuwait is not a member of the Security Council. Secondly, the Security Council, despite its many periodic

reviews — almost 40 — has taken a unanimous decision not to lift the sanctions against Iraq. There has always been consensus on maintaining the sanctions because of Iraq's failure to implement its obligations under the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Thirdly, the Security Council unanimously decided to add sanctions against Iraq in its resolution 1194 (1998) when it decided in September to suspend the review of the sanctions because of Iraq's failure to cooperate with the United Nations Special Commission and the International Atomic Energy Agency in their mission of supervising the destruction of the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction.

Fourthly, Kuwait is a small country that does not exercise any influence over members of the Council, permanent or otherwise. Iraq's problem is with the Security Council representing international legitimacy.

Iraq claims that it has fulfilled all of its obligations; that is its constant allegation. But the Security Council feels otherwise. Also, the Non-Aligned Movement, at its last summit conference, called on Iraq to complete the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions, as did the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Gulf Cooperation Council. I do not believe that all these international and regional organizations are prejudiced against Iraq, as it claims.

Can it be that all of these are at fault and only Iraq is right? Let us remember that it was Iraq that launched a war of aggression against Kuwait in 1990 and occupied it.

Finally, I should like to affirm Kuwait's commitment to the statement made by its Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister.

Mr. Burleigh (United States of America): The diatribe from the Cuban representative, I have to say, is across the board flatly wrong in its description of my country. It is a totally unrecognizable picture and completely off-base, as I think he probably knows in his heart of hearts.

The point we were discussing here is the condition of the Cuban people, and I would only assert to our Cuban colleague that the Cuban people vote with their feet, as we say in America. They leave Cuba whenever they have the chance, and they go to the United States and many other places where they can prosper and live in freedom. They get both freedom and prosperity not in Cuba, but in these other lands where they seek refuge, including my country.

And one final factual point: more than $2 billion — billion, not million — in private humanitarian assistance has been licensed from the United States to Cuba since 1992.

Mr. Robaina González (Cuba) (*interpretation from Spanish*): On this occasion I will not have to wait until tomorrow. Once again we have been given an American lesson in dual morality. The United States does not pay the United Nations and wants to lead it. It speaks of democracy and acts as an empire. It talks a great deal about human rights and violates those of its own citizens, its minorities and its poor people. It talks a great deal about human rights and then violates those of two thirds of humankind with its unilateral blockades and sanctions. It launches missiles on its own initiative. It puts in place ridiculous measures with respect to entering the United Nations building, while the terrorist activities of which I have spoken continue to be organized, with total impunity, on its own territory.

Please do not talk to us any more about this twofold morality, because that would require at least two more interventions tonight. Do not try to teach us anything, because we all are resolved to go on continuing to be sovereign States. And above all do not threaten Cuba, because our people are prepared for anything.

Programme of work

Mrs. Ataeva (Turkmenistan), Vice-President, in the Chair.

The Acting President (*interpretation from Russian*): I should like to draw the attention of the General Assembly to document A/INF/53/3, which contains a tentative programme of work and schedule of plenary meetings for the period from 28 September to mid-October.

I should like to point out that this schedule was prepared to facilitate the organization of the work of delegations and to help ensure that the relevant documentation is ready for the discussion of the respective items. The lists of speakers for all the items listed in document A/INF/53/3 will be open as of Monday, 28 September.

The President will in due course announce the dates for the consideration of other agenda items and will keep the Assembly informed of any additions or changes.

The meeting rose at 7.40 p.m.